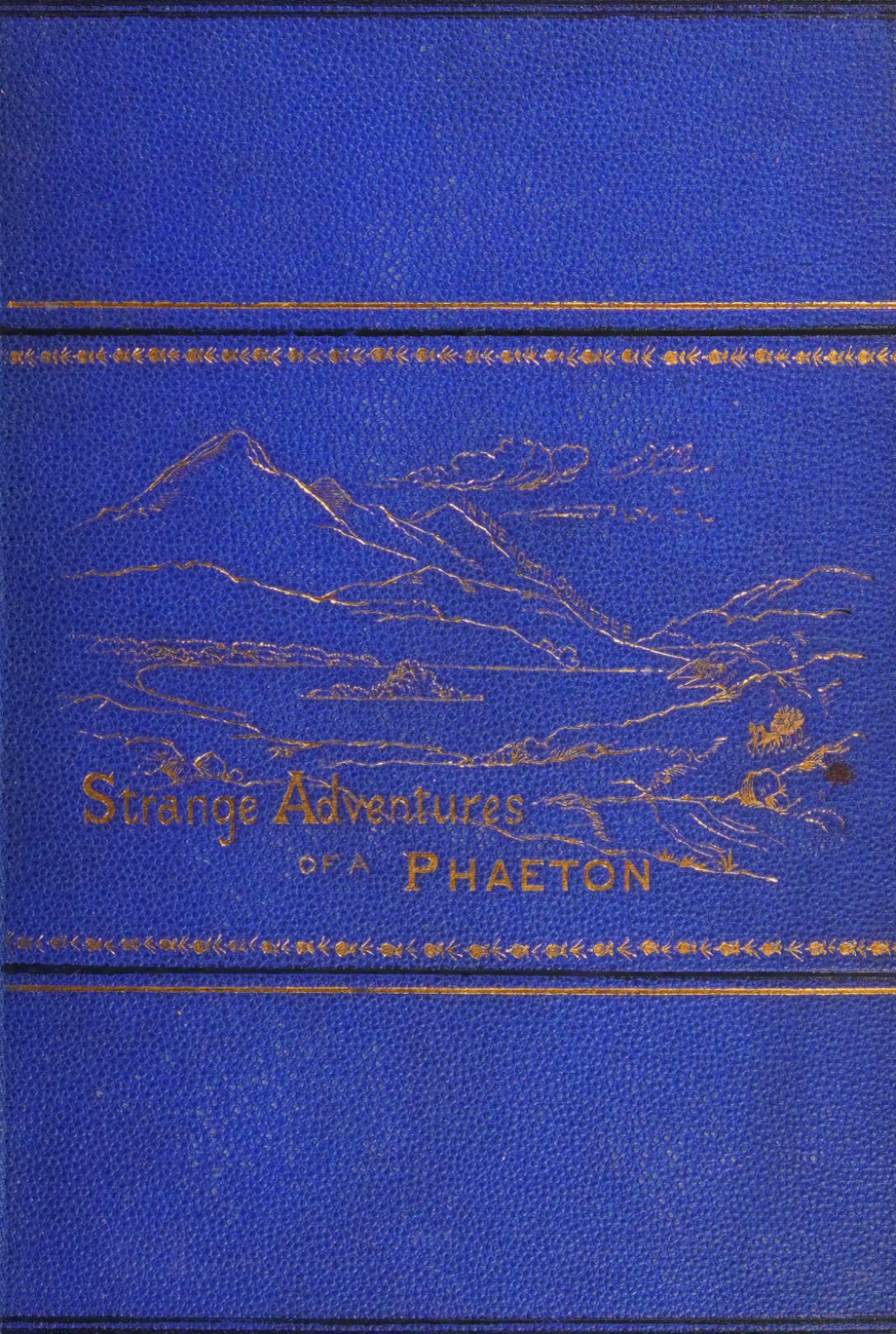
Strange Adventures
OF A PHAETON

THE

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STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A PHAETON.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "A DAUGHTER OF HETH," ETC. ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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LONDON
R. CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS,
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To

E. W. S.

I look back on a journey which was made pleasant by the fancy that you might have been with me; I look forward to another and longer journey rendered beautiful by the hope that you may be with me; and I find this book between. What can I do with it but lay it at your feet, and ask you, as you look over its pages, and smile at the distorted vision of yourself you may find there, to forgive the rude and graceless outlines that were meant to portray one of the most innocent, tender, and beautiful souls God has ever given to the world? The blind man, who has never seen the stars, dreams of them, and is happy. And if he should be cured of his blindness, and get to know the stars and become familiar with all the majesty and wonder of them, will he look with much contempt on those imperfect pictures of them he had formed in the time of his loneliness and ignorance? I think not; and that is the excuse I have for offering to you this book, knowing that you will look charitably on these gropings in the dark, for the sake of the love and admiration that prompted them.

London, October 2, 1872.

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THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A PHAETON.

CHAPTER I.

OUR BELL.

"Oh, the oak, and the ash, and the bonny ivy-tree,
They grow so green in the North Countrie!"

It was all settled one evening in the deep winter time. Outside, a sharp east wind was whistling round the solitudes of Box Hill; the Mole, at the foot of our garden, as it stole stealthily through the darkness, crackled the flakes of ice that lay along its level banks; and away on Mickleham Downs—and on the further uplands towards the sea—the cold stars were shining down on a thin coating of snow.

Indoors there was another story to tell; for the mistress of the house—Queen Titania, as we call her—a small person, with a calm, handsome, pale face,

an abundance of black hair, big eyes that are occasionally somewhat cold and critical in look, and a certain magnificence of manner which makes you fancy her rather a tall and stately woman—has a trick of so filling her drawing-room with dexterous traceries of grass and ferns, with plentiful flowers of her own rearing, and with a crowded glare of light, that, amid the general warmth, the glow and perfume, and variety of brilliant colours, you would almost forget that the winter is chill and desolate and dark.

Then Bell, our guest and companion for many a year, lends herself to the deception; for the wilful young person, though there were a dozen inches of snow on the meadows, would come down to dinner in a dress of blue, with touches of white gossamer and fur about the tight wrists and neck—with a white rose and a bunch of forget-me-nots, as blue as her eyes, twisted into the soft masses of her light-brown hair, and with a certain gay and careless demeanour, meant to let us know that she, having been born and bred in the North Country, has a fine contempt for the mild rigours of our southern winter.

But on this particular evening, Bell—our Bell, our Bonny Bell, our Lady Bell, as she is variously called when she provokes people into giving her pet names—had been sitting for a long time with an open book on her knee; and as this volume was all about the

English lakes, and gave pictures of them, and placed here and there little tail-pieces of ferns and blossoms, she may have been driven to contrast the visions thus conjured up with the realities suggested by the fierce gusts of wind that were blowing coldly through the box-trees outside. All at once she placed the volume gently on the white hearth-rug, and said, with a strange wistfulness shining in the deeps of her blue eyes,—

"Tita, cannot you make us talk about the summer, and drown the noise of that dreadful wind? Why don't we conspire to cheat the winter and make believe it is summer again? Doesn't it seem to be years and years ago since we had the long light evenings; the walks between the hedge-rows, the waiting for the moon, up on the crest of the hill, and then the quiet stroll downward into the valley and home again, with the wild roses, and the meadow-sweet, and the evening campions filling the warm night air? Come, let us sit close together, and make it summer! See, Tita!—it is a bright forenoon—you can nearly catch a glimpse of the Downs above Brighton—and we are going to shut up the house, and go away anywhere for a whole month. Round comes that dear old mail-phaeton, and my pair of bonny bays are whinnying for a bit of sugar. Papa is sulky——"

"As usual," remarks my Lady, without lifting her eyes from the carpet.

"——for though the imperial has been slung on, there is scarcely enough room for the heaps of our luggage, and, like every man, he has a deadly hatred of bonnet-boxes. Then you take your seat, my dear, looking like a small empress in a grey travelling dress; and Papa—after pretending to have inspected all the harness—takes the reins; I pop in behind, for the hood, when it is turned down, makes such a pleasant cushion for your arms, and you can stick your sketch-book into it, and a row of apples and anything else; and Sandy touches his forelock, and Kate bobs a curtsy, and away and away we go! How sweet and fresh the air is, Tita! and don't you smell the honeysuckle in the hedge? Why, here we are at Dorking! Papa pulls up to grumble about the last beer that was sent; and then Castor and Pollux toss up their heads again, and on we drive to Guildford, and to Reading, and to Oxford. And all through England we go, using sometimes the old coaching-roads, and sometimes the by-roads, stopping at the curious little inns, and chatting to the old country folks and singing ballads of an evening as we sit upon the hill-sides, and watch the partridges dusting themselves below us in the road; and then on and on again. Is not that the sea, Tita?—look at the long stretch of Morecambe Bay and the yellow sands, and the steamers on the horizon! But all at once we dive into the hills

again, and we come to the old familiar places by Applethwaite and Ambleside, and then some evening—some evening, Tita—we come in sight of Grasmere, and then—and then——"

"Why, Bell!—what is the matter with you?" cries the other, and the next minute her arms are round the light-brown head, crushing its white rose and its blue forget-me-nots.

"If you two young creatures," it is remarked, "would seriously settle where we are to go next summer, you would be better employed than in rubbing your heads together like a couple of baby calves."

"Settle!" says Lady Tita, with a smile of gentle impertinence on her face; "we know who is allowed to settle things in this house. If we were to settle anything, some wonderful discovery would be made about the horses' feet, or the wheels of that valuable phaeton which was made, I should fancy, about the time the owner of it was born——"

"The wife who mocks at her husband's grey hairs," I remark calmly, "knowing the share she has had in producing them——"

Here our Bonny Bell interfered, and a truce was concluded. The armistice was devoted to consideration of Bell's project, which at length it was resolved to adopt. Why, after going year after year round the southern counties in that big, old-fashioned phaeton

which had become as a house to us, should we not strike fairly northward? These circles round the south would resemble the swinging of a stone in the sling before it is projected; and, once we were started on this straight path, who could tell how far we might not go?

"Then," said I,—for our thoughts at this time were often directed to the great masses of men who were marching through the wet valleys of France, or keeping guard amid cold and fog in the trenches around Paris,—"suppose that by July next the war may be over,—Count Von Rosen says he means to pay us a visit, and have a look at England. Why should not he join our party, and become a companion for Bell?"

I had inadvertently probed a hornets' nest. The women of our household were at that time bitter against the Germans; and but half an hour before Bell herself had been eloquently denouncing the doings of the Prussians. Had they not in secrecy been preparing to steal back Alsace and Lorraine; had they not taken advantage of the time when the good and gentle France was averse from war to provoke a quarrel; had not the King openly insulted the French Ambassador in the promenade at Ems; and had not their hordes of men swarmed into the quiet villages, slaying and destroying, robbing the poor and aged, and winning battles by mere force of numbers? Besides, the suggestion that this

young lieutenant of cavalry might be a companion for Bell appeared to be an intentional injury done to a certain amiable young gentleman, of no particular prospects, living in the Temple; and so Bell forthwith declared her dislike not only of the German officers, but of all officers whatsoever.

"And as for Count Von Rosen," she said, "I can remember him at Bonn only as a very rude and greedy boy, who showed a great row of white teeth when he laughed, and made bad jokes about my mistakes in German. And now I dare say he is a tall fellow, with a stiff neck, a brown face, perhaps a beard, a clanking sword, and the air of a Bobadil, as he stalks into an inn and calls out, '*Kellnare! eene Pulle Seet! und sayen Sie mal, was haben Sie für Zeitungen—die Alljemeene?*'"

I ventured to point out to Bell that she might alter her opinion when Von Rosen actually came over with all the glamour of a hero about him; and that, indeed, she could not do better than marry him.

Bell opened her eyes.

"Marry him, because he is a hero! No! I would not marry a hero, after he had become a hero. It would be something to marry a man who was afterwards to become great, and be with him all the time of his poverty and his struggles. That would be worth something—to comfort him when he was in despair, to be kind to him when he was suffering; and then, when

it was all over, and he had got his head above these troubles, he would say to you, 'Oh, Kate, or Nell,' as your name might be, 'how good you were during the old time when we were poor and friendless!' But when he has become a hero, he thinks he will overawe you with the shadow of his great reputation. He thinks he has only to come, and hold out the tips of his fingers, and say, 'I am a great person. Everybody worships me. I will allow you to share my brilliant fortune, and you will dutifully kiss me.' *Merci, monsieur!* but if any man were to come to me like that, I would answer him as Canning's knife-grinder was answered—'I give you kisses? I will see you——'"

"Bell!" cried my Lady peremptorily.

Bell stopped, and then blushed, and dropped her eyes.

"What is one to do," she asked, meekly, "when a quotation comes in?"

"You used to be a good girl," said Queen Tita, in her severest manner, "but you are becoming worse and worse every day. I hear you sing the refrains of horrid street songs. Your love of sitting up at night is dreadful. The very maid-servants are shocked by your wilful provincialisms. And you treat me, for whom you ought to show some respect, with a levity and familiarity without example. I will send a report of your behaviour to——"

And here the look of mischief in Bell's eyes—which had been deepening just as you may see the pupil of a cat widening before she makes a spring—suddenly gave way to a glance of urgent and meek entreaty, which was recognized in the proper quarter. Tita named no names; and the storm blew over.

For the present, therefore, the project of adding this young Uhlan to our party was dropped; but the idea of our northward trip remained, and gradually assumed definite consistency. Indeed, as it developed itself during those long winter evenings, it came to be a thing to dream about. But all the same I could see that Tita sometimes returned to the notion of providing a companion for Bell; and, whatever may have been her dislike of the Germans in general, Lieutenant von Rosen was not forgotten. At odd times, when

> "In her hazel eyes her thoughts lay clear
> As pebbles in a brook,"

it seemed to me that she was busy with those forecasts which are dear to the hearts of women. One night we three were sitting as quietly as usual, talking about something else, when she suddenly remarked—

"I suppose that Count von Rosen is as poor as Prussian lieutenants generally are?"

"On the contrary," said I, "he enjoys a very handsome *Familien-Stiftung*, or family bequest, which gives

him a certain sum of money every six months, on condition that during that time he has either travelled so much or gone through such and such a course of study. I wish the legacies left in our country had sometimes those provisions attached."

"He has some money, then," said my Lady, thoughtfully.

"My dear," said I, "you seem to be very anxious about the future, like the man whose letter I read to you yesterday.[1] Have you any further questions to ask?"

"I suppose he cares for nothing but eating and drinking and smoking, like other officers? He has not been troubled by any very great sentimental crisis?"

"On the contrary," I repeated, "he wrote me a despairing letter, some fortnight before the war broke out, about that same Fräulein Fallersleben whom we saw acting in the theatre at Hanover. She had treated him very badly—she had——"

[1] This is the letter :—

"To the Editor of the *Hampshire Ass.*

"Sir,—If the Republicans who are endeavouring to introduce a Republic into this great country should accomplish their disgusting purpose, do you think they will repudiate the National Debt, and pay no more interest on the Consols?

"I am, Sir,

"Your obedient Servant,

"Bogmere, *Jan.* 18, 1871." "A Lover of Mankind.

"Oh, that is all nothing," said Tita hastily—and here she glanced rather nervously at Bell.

Bell, for her part, was unconcernedly fitting a pink collar on a white cat, and talking to that pretty but unresponsive animal.

"He left her," I remarked again, "in paroxysms of anger and mutual reproach. He accused her of having——"

"Well, well, that will do," says Queen Titania, in her coldest manner; and then, of course, everybody obeys the small woman.

That was the last that was heard of Von Rosen for many a day; and it was not until some time after the war was over that he favoured us with a communication. He was still in France. He hoped to get over to England at the end of July; and as that was the time we had fixed for our journey from London to Edinburgh, along the old coach-roads, he became insensibly mixed up with the project, until it was finally resolved to ask him to join the party.

"I know you mean to marry these two," I said to the person who rules over us all.

"How absurd you are," she replied, with a vast assumption of dignity. "Bell is as good as engaged —even if there was any fear of a handsome young Englishwoman falling in love with a Prussian lieutenant who is in despair about an actress."

"You had better take a wedding-ring with you."

"A wedding-ring!" said Tita, with a little curl of her lips. "You fancy that a girl thinks of nothing but that. Every wedding-ring that is worn represents a man's impertinence and a woman's folly."

"Ask Bell," said I.

CHAPTER II.

A LUNCHEON IN HOLBORN.

"From the bleak coast that hears
The German Ocean roar, deep-blooming, strong,
And yellow-haired, the blue-eyed Saxon came."

No more fitting point of departure could have been chosen than the Old Bell Inn in Holborn, an ancient hostelry which used in bygone times to send its relays of stage-coaches to Oxford, Cheltenham, Enfield, Abingdon, and a score of other places. Now, from the quaint little yard, which is surrounded by frail and dilapidated galleries of wood, that tell of the grandeur of other days, there starts but a solitary omnibus, which daily whisks a few country people and their parcels down to Uxbridge, and Chalfont, and Amersham, and Wendover. The vehicle which Mr. Thoroughgood has driven for many a year is no magnificent blue and scarlet drag, with teams costing six hundred guineas apiece, with silver harness, a post-boy blowing a silver horn, and a

lord handling the reins; but a rough and serviceable little coach which is worked for profit, and which is of vast convenience to the folks living in quiet Buckinghamshire villages apart from railways. From this old-fashioned inn, now that the summer had come round, and our long-looked-for journey to the North had come near, we had resolved to start; and Bell having gravely pointed out the danger of letting our young Uhlan leave London hungry—lest habit should lead him to seize something by the way, and so get us into trouble—it was further proposed that we should celebrate our setting-out with a luncheon of good roast beef and ale, in the snug little parlour which abuts on the yard.

"And I hope," said Queen Titania, as we escaped from the roar of Holborn into the archway of the inn, "that the stupid fellow has got himself decently dressed. Otherwise, we shall be mobbed."

The fact was that Count von Rosen, not being aware that English officers rarely appear when off duty in uniform, had come straight from St. Denis to Calais, and from Calais to London, and from London to Leatherhead, without ever dreaming that he ought not to go about in his regimentals. He drew no distinction between Herr Graf von Rosen and Seiner Majestät Lieutenant im —ten Uhlanen-Regimente; although he told us that when he issued from his hotel at Charing Cross to get into a cab, he was surprised to see a small

crowd collect around the hansom, and no less surprised to observe the absence of military costume in the streets. Of course, the appearance of an Uhlan in the quiet village of Leatherhead caused a profound commotion; and had not Castor and Pollux been able to distance the crowd of little boys who flocked around him at the station, it is probable he would have arrived at our house attended by that concourse of admirers.

You should have seen the courteous and yet half-defiant way in which the women received him, as if they were resolved not to be overawed by the tall, browned, big-bearded man; and how, in about twenty minutes, they had insensibly got quite familiar with him, apparently won over by his careless laughter, by the honest stare of his light-blue eyes, and by a very boyish blush that sometimes overspread his handsome face when he stammered over an idiom, or was asked some question about his own exploits. Bell remained the most distant; but I could see that our future companion had produced a good impression on my Lady, for she began to take the management of him, and to give him counsel in a minute and practical manner, which is a sure mark of her favour. She told him he must put aside his uniform while in England. She described to him the ordinary costume worn by English gentlemen in travelling. And then she hoped he would take a

preparation of quinine with him, considering that we should have to stay in a succession of strange inns, and might be exposed to damp.

He went up to London that night, armed with a list of articles which he was to buy for himself before starting with us.

There was a long pause when we three found ourselves together again. At length Bell said, with rather an impatient air—

"He is only a schoolboy, after all. Why should he continue to call you *Madame*, and me *Mademoiselle*, just as he did when he knew us first at Bonn, and gave us these names as a joke? Then he has the same irritating habit of laughing that he used to have there. I hate a man who has his mouth always open—like a swallow in the air, trying to catch anything that may come. And he is worse, I think, when he closes his lips and tries to give himself an intellectual look, like—like——"

"Like what, Bell?"

"Like a calf posing itself, and trying to look like a red deer," said Bell with a sort of contemptuous warmth.

"I wish, Bell," said my Lady, coldly and severely, "that you would give up those rude metaphors. You talk just as you did when you came fresh from Westmoreland—you have learnt nothing."

Bell's only answer was to walk, with rather a proud

air, to the piano, and there she sat down and played a few bars. She would not speak; but the well-known old air spoke for her, for it said, as plain as words could say—

> "A North Country maid up to London had strayed,
> Although with her nature it did not agree;
> She wept, and she sighed, and she bitterly cried,
> 'I wish once again in the North I could be!'"

"I think," continued Tita, in measured tones, "that he is a very agreeable and trustworthy young man—not very polished, perhaps; but then he is a German. I look forward with great interest to see in what light our English country life will strike him; and I hope, Bell, that he will not have to complain of the want of courtesy shown him by Englishwomen."

This was getting serious; so, being to some small and undefined extent master in my own house, I commanded Bell to sing the song she was petulantly strumming. That "fetched" Tita. Whenever Bell began to sing one of those old English ballads, which she did for the most part from morning till night, there was a strange and tremulous thrill in her voice that would have disarmed her bitterest enemy; and straightway my Lady would be seen to draw over to the girl, and put her arm round her shoulder, and then reward her, when the last chord of the accompaniment had been struck, with a grateful kiss. In the present instance, the charm

worked as usual; but no sooner had these two young people been reconciled than they turned on their mutual benefactor. Indeed, an observant stranger might have remarked in this household, that when anything remotely bearing on a quarrel was made up between any two of its members, the third, the peacemaker, was expected to propose a dinner at Greenwich. The custom would have been more becoming had the cost been equally distributed; but there were three losers to one payer.

Well, when we got into the yard of the Old Bell, the Buckinghamshire omnibus was being loaded; and among the first objects we saw was the stalwart figure of Von Rosen, who was talking to Mr. Thoroughgood as if he had known him all his life, and examining with a curious and critical eye the construction and accommodation of the venerable old vehicle. We saw with some satisfaction that he was now dressed in a suit of grey garments, with a wide-awake hat; and, indeed, there was little to distinguish him from an Englishman but the curious blending of colour—from the tawny yellow of his moustache to the deep brown of his cropped beard—which is seldom absent from the hirsute decoration of a Prussian face.

He came forward with a grave and ceremonious politeness to Queen Titania, who received him in her dignified, quaint, maternal fashion; and he shook hands

with Bell with an obviously unconscious air of indifference. Then, not noticing her silence, he talked to her, after we had gone inside, of the old-fashioned air of homeliness and comfort noticeable in the inn, of the ancient portraits, and the quaint fireplace, and the small busts placed about. Bell seemed rather vexed that he should address himself to her, and uttered scarcely a word in reply.

But when our plain and homely meal was served, this restraint gradually wore away; and in the talk over our coming adventures, Bell abandoned herself to all sorts of wild anticipations. She forgot the presence of the German lieutenant. Her eyes were fixed on the North Country, and on summer nights up amid the Westmoreland hills, and on bright mornings up by the side of the Scotch lochs; and while the young soldier looked gravely at her, and even seemed a trifle surprised, she told us of all the dreams and visions she had had of the journey, for weeks and months back, and how the pictures of it had been with her night and day until she was almost afraid the reality would not bear them out. Then she described—as if she were gifted with second sight—the various occupations we should have to follow during the long afternoons in the North; and how she had brought her guitar that Queen Titania might sing Spanish songs to it; and how we

listen to the corn-crake; and how she would make studies of all the favourite places we came to, and perhaps might even construct a picture of our phaeton and Castor and Pollux—with a background of half-a-dozen counties—for some exhibition; and how, some day in the far future, when the memory of our long excursion had grown dim, Tita would walk into a room in Pall Mall, and there, with the picture before her, would turn round with wonder in her eyes, as if it were a revelation.

"Because," said Bell, turning seriously to the young Uhlan, and addressing him as though she had talked familiarly to him for years, "you mustn't suppose that our Tita is anything but a hypocrite. All her coldness and affectation of grandeur are only a pretence; and sometimes, if you watch her eyes—and she is not looking at you—you will see something come up to the surface of them as if it were her real heart and soul there, looking out in wonder and softness at some beautiful thing—just like a dabchick, you know, when you are watching among bushes by a river, and are quite still; and then, if you make the least remark, if you rustle your dress, snap! down goes the dabchick, and you see nothing, and my Lady turns to you quite proudly and coldly—though there may be tears in her eyes—and dares you to think that she has shown any emotion."

"That is, when she is listening to you singing?" said the Lieutenant, gravely and politely; and at this moment Bell seemed to become conscious that we were all amused by her vehemence, blushed prodigiously, and was barely civil to our Uhlan for half an hour after.

Nevertheless, she had every reason to be in a good humour; for we had resolved to limit our travels that day to Twickenham, where, in the evening, Tita was to see her two boys who were at school there. And as the young gentleman of the Temple, who has already been briefly mentioned in this narrative, is a son of the schoolmaster with whom the boys were then living, and as he was to be of the farewell party assembled in Twickenham at night, Bell had no unpleasant prospect before her for that day at least. And of one thing she was probably by that time thoroughly assured; no fires of jealousy were in danger of being kindled in any sensitive breast by the manner of Count von Rosen towards her. Of course he was very courteous and obliging to a pretty young woman; but he talked almost exclusively to my Lady; while, to state the plain truth, he seemed to pay more attention to his luncheon than to both of them together.

Behold, then, our phaeton ready to start! The pair of pretty bays are pawing the hard stones and pricking their ears at the unaccustomed sounds of Holborn; Sandy is at their head, regarding them rather dolefully,

as if he feared to let them slip from his care to undertake so long and perilous a voyage; Queen Titania has arranged that she shall sit behind, to show the young Prussian all the remarkable things on our route; and Bell, as she gets up in front, begs to have the reins given her so soon as we get away from the crowded thoroughfares. There are still a few loiterers on the pavement who had assembled to see the Wendover omnibus leave; and these regard with a languid sort of curiosity the setting-out of the party in the big dark-green phaeton.

A little tossing of heads and prancing, a little adjustment of the reins, and a final look round, and then we glide into the wild and roaring stream of vehicles —that mighty current of rolling vans, and heavy waggons, and crowded Bayswater omnibuses, of dexterous hansoms and indolent four-wheelers, of brewers' drays and post-office carts and costermongers' barrows. Over the great thoroughfare, with its quaint and huddled houses and its innumerable shops, dwell a fine blue sky and white clouds that seem oddly discoloured. The sky, seen through a curious pall of mist and smoke, is only grey, and the clouds are distant and dusky and yellow, like those of an old landscape that has lain for years in a broker's shop. Then there is a faint glow of sunlight shining along the houses on the northern side of the street; and here and there the

window of some lobster-shop or tavern glints back the light. As we get farther westward, the sky overhead gets clearer, and the character of the thoroughfare alters. Here we are at the street leading up to the British Museum—a Mudie and a Moses on each hand—and it would almost seem as if the Museum had sent out rays of influence to create around it a series of smaller collections. In place of the humble fishmonger and the familiar hosier, we have owners of large windows filled with curious treasures of art—old-fashioned jewellery, china, knick-knacks of furniture, silver spoons and kettles, and stately portraits of the time of Charles II., in which the women have all beaded black eyes, yellow curls, and a false complexion, while the men are fat, pompous, and wigged. Westward still, and we approach the huge shops and warehouses of Oxford Street, where the last waves of fashionable life, seeking millinery, beat on the eastern barriers that shut out the rest of London. Regent Street is busy on this quiet afternoon; and Bell asks in a whisper whether the countryman of Blücher, now sitting behind us, does not betray in his eyes what he thinks of this vast show of wealth. Listening for a moment, we hear that Queen Titania, instead of talking to him about the shops, is trying to tell him what London was in the last century, and how Colonel Jack and his associates, before that enterprising youth started to walk from

London to Edinburgh to avoid the law, used to waylay travellers in the fields between Gray's Inn and St. Pancras, and how, having robbed a coach between Hyde Park Gate and Knightsbridge, they "went over the fields to Chelsea." This display of erudition on the part of my Lady has evidently been prepared beforehand; for she even goes the length of quoting dates and furnishing a few statistics—a thing which no woman does inadvertently. However, when we get into Pall Mall, her ignorance of the names of the clubs reveals the superficial nature of her acquirements; for even Bell is able to recognize the Reform, assisted, doubtless, by the polished pillars of the Carlton. The women are, of course, eager to know which is the Prince of Wales's Club, and afterwards look with quite a peculiar interest on the brick wall of Marlborough House.

"Now," says our Bonny Bell, as we get into the quiet of St. James's Park, where the trees of the long avenue and the shrubbery around the ponds look quite pleasant and fresh even under the misty London sunlight; "now you must let me have the reins. I am wearying to get away from the houses, and be really on the road to Scotland. Indeed, I shall not feel that we have actually set out until we leave Twickenham, and are fairly on the old coach-road at Hounslow."

I looked at Bell. She did not blush; but calmly waited to take the reins. I had then to point out to

the young hypocrite that her wiles were of no avail. She was not anxious to be beyond Twickenham; she was chiefly anxious to get down thither. Notwithstanding that she knew we had chosen a capricious and roundabout road to reach this first stage on our journey, merely to show Von Rosen something of London and its suburban beauties, she was looking with impatience to the long circuit by Clapham Common, Wimbledon, and Richmond Park. Therefore she was not in a condition to be entrusted with the safety of so valuable a freight.

"I am not impatient," said Bell, with her colour a trifle heightened: "I do not care whether we ever get to Twickenham. I would as soon go to Henley to-night, and to-morrow to Oxford. But it is just like a man to make a great bother and go in prodigious circles to reach a trifling distance. You go circling and circling like the minute-hand of a clock; but the small hand, that takes it easy, and makes no clatter of ticking, finds at twelve o'clock that it has got quite as far as its big companion."

"This, Bell," I remarked, "is impertinence."

"Will you give me the reins?"

"No."

Bell turned half round, and leaned her arm on the lowered hood.

"My dear," she said to Queen Titania—who had

been telling the Count something about Buckingham Palace—"we have forgotten one thing. What are we to do when our companions are disagreeable during the day? In the evening we can read, or sing, or walk about by ourselves. But during the day, Tita? When we are imprisoned, how are we to escape?"

"We shall put you in the imperial, if you are not a good girl," said my Lady, with a gracious sweetness; and then she turned to the Count.

It would have been cruel to laugh at Bell. For a minute or two after meeting with this rebuff, she turned rather away from us, and stared with a fine assumption of proud indifference down the Vauxhall Bridge Road. But presently a lurking smile began to appear about the corners of her mouth; and at last she cried out—

"Well, there is no use quarrelling with a married man, for he never pets you. He is familiar with the trick of it, I suppose, and looks on like an old juggler watching the efforts of an amateur. See! how lovely the river is up there by Chelsea—the long reach of rippling grey, the green of the trees, and the curious silvery light that almost hides the heights beyond. We shall see the Thames often, shall we not? and then the Severn, and then the Solway, and then the great Frith of the Forth? When I think of it, I feel like a bird—a lark fluttering up in happiness—and

seeing farther and farther every minute. To see the Solway, you know, you have to be up almost in the blue; and then all around you there rises the wide plain of England, with fields, and woods, and streams. Fancy being able to see as far as a vulture, and to go swooping on for leagues and leagues—now up amid white peaks of snow—or down through some great valley—or across the sea in the sunset. And only fancy that some evening you might find the spectral ship beginning to appear in pale fire in the mist of the horizon—coming on towards you without a sound—do you know, that is the most terrible legend ever thought of!"

"What has a vulture to do with the Flying Dutchman?" said my Lady Tita suddenly; and Bell turned with a start to find her friend's head close to her own. "You are becoming incoherent, Bell, and your eyes are as wild as if you were really looking at the phantom ship. Why are you not driving?"

"Because I am not allowed," said Bell.

However, when we got into the Clapham Road, Bell had her wish. She took her place with the air of a practised whip; and did not even betray any nervousness when a sudden whistle behind us warned her that she was in the way of a tramway-car. Moreover, she managed to subdue so successfully her impatience to get to Twickenham, that she was able to

take us in the gentlest manner possible up and across Clapham Common, down through Wandsworth, and up again towards Wimbledon. When, at length, we got to the brow of the hill that overlooks the long and undulating stretches of furze, the admiration of our Prussian friend, which had been called forth by the various parks and open spaces in and around London, almost rose to the pitch of enthusiasm.

"Is it the sea down there, yes?" he asked, looking towards the distant tent-poles, which certainly resembled a small forest of masts in the haze of the sunshine. "It is not the sea? I almost expect to reach the shore always in England. Yet why have you so beautiful places like this around London—so much more beautiful than the sandy country around our Berlin—and no one to come to it? You have more than three millions of people—here is a playground—why do they not come? And Clapham Common too, it is not used for people to walk in, as we should use it in Germany, and have a pleasant seat in a garden, and the women sewing until their husbands and friends come in the evening, and music to make it pleasant, afterwards. It is nothing—a waste—a landscape—very beautiful—but not used. You have children on donkeys, and boys playing their games—that is very good—but it is not enough. And here, this beautiful park, all thrown away—no

one here at all. Why does not your Lord Mayor see the—the requirement—of drawing away large numbers of people from so big a town for fresh air; and make here some amusements?"

"Consider the people who live all around," said my Lady, "and what they would have to suffer."

"Suffer!" said the young Prussian, with his eyes staring; "I do not understand you. For people to walk through gardens, and smoke, and drink a glass or two of beer, or sit under the trees and sew or read—surely that is not offensive to any person. And here the houses are miles away—you cannot see them down beyond the windmill there."

"Did you ever hear of such things as manorial rights, and freeholders, and copyholders, and the Statute of Merton?" he is asked.

"All that is nothing—a fiction," he retorted. "You have a Government in this country representing the people; why not take all these commons and use them for the people? And if the Government has not courage to do that, why do not your municipalities, which are rich, buy up the land, and provide amusements, and draw the people into the open air?"

My Lady Tita could scarce believe her ears on hearing a Prussian aristocrat talk thus coolly of confiscation, and exhibit no more reverence for the tra-

ditional rights of property than if he were a Parisian socialist. But then these boys of twenty-five will dance over the world's edge in pursuit of a theory.

Here, too, as Bell gently urged our horses forward towards the crest of the slope leading down to Baveley Bridge, Von Rosen got his first introduction to an English landscape. All around him lay the brown stretches of sand and the blue-green clumps of furze of the common; on either side of the wide and well-made road, the tall banks were laden with a tangled luxuriance of brushwood and bramble and wild-flowers; down in the hollow beneath us there were red-tiled farm-buildings half hid in a green maze of elms and poplars; then the scattered and irregular fields and meadows, scored with hedges and dotted with houses, led up to a series of heights that were wooded with every variety of forest tree; while over all these undulations and plains there lay that faint presence of mist which only served to soften the glow of the afternoon sunshine, and show us the strong colours of the picture through a veil of tender ethereal grey.

We go down the hill, and roll along the valley.

"This is the Robin Hood Gate," says Queen Tita. "Have you heard of Robin Hood, Count von Rosen?"

"Oh yes. He was one of those picturesque men that we have many of in our German stories. We like huntsmen, outlaws, and such people; and the

German boys, they do know of Robin Hood as much as of William Tell."

"But then, you know," says Tita, gravely, "Robin Hood was a real person."

"And was not William Tell?"

"They say not."

The Lieutenant laughed.

"Madame," he said, "I did not know you were so learned. But if there was no William Tell, are you sure there was any Robin Hood?"

"Oh, yes, I am quite sure," said my Lady, earnestly; which closed this chapter of profound historical criticism.

Richmond Park, in the stillness of a fine sunset, was worth bringing a foreigner to see. The ruddy light from the west was striking here and there among the glades under the oaks; across the bars of radiance and shadow the handsome little bucks and long-necked does were lightly passing and repassing; while there were rabbits in thousands trotting in and about the brackens, with an occasional covey of young partridges alternately regarding us with upstretched necks and then running off a few yards further. But after we had bowled along the smooth and level road, up and through the avenues of stately oaks, past the small lakes (one of them, beyond the shadow of a dark wood, gleamed like a line of gold), and up to the

summit of Richmond Hill, Queen Titania had not a word to say further in pointing out the beauties of the place. She had been officiating as conductor, but it was with the air of a proprietress. Now, as we stopped the phaeton on the crest of the hill, she was silent.

Far away behind us lay the cold green of the eastern sky, and under it the smoke of London lay red and brown, while in the extreme distance we could see dim traces of houses, and down in the south a faint rosy mist. Some glittering yellow rays showed us where the Crystal Palace, high over the purple shadows of Sydenham, caught the sunlight; and up by Notting Hill, too, there were one or two less distinct glimmerings of glass. But when we turned to the west, no such range of vision was permitted to us. All over the bed of the river there lay across the western sky a confused glare of pale gold—not a distinct sunset, with sharp lines of orange and blood-red fire, but a bewildering haze that blinded the eyes and was rather ominous for the morrow. Along the horizon,

> "where, enthroned in adamantine state,
> Proud of her bards, imperial Windsor sits,"

there was no trace of the grey towers to be made out, but a confused and level mass of silver streaks and

lines of blue. Nearer at hand, the spacious and wooded landscape seemed almost dark under the glare of the sky; and the broad windings of the Thames lay white and clear between the soft green of the Twickenham shores and the leafy masses of "umbrageous Ham."

"Doesn't it seem as though the strange light away up there in the north and out in the west lay over some unknown country," said Bell, with her eyes filled with the glamour of the sunset, "and that to-morrow we were to begin our journey into a great prairie, and leave houses and people for ever behind us? You can see no more villages, but only miles and miles of woods and plains, until you come to a sort of silver mist, and that might be the sea."

"And a certain young lady stands on the edge of this wild and golden desert, and a melancholy look comes into her eyes. For she is fond of houses and her fellow-creatures, and here, just close at hand—down there, in Twickenham, in fact—there is a comfortable dining-room and some pleasant friends, and one attentive person in particular, who is perhaps a little sorry to bid her good-bye. Yet she does not falter. To-morrow morning she will hold out her hand—a tender and wistful smile will only half convey her sadness——"

Here Bell rapidly but lightly touched Pollux with

the whip; both the horses sprang forward with a jerk that had nearly thrown the Lieutenant into the road (for he was standing up and holding on by the hood); and then, without another word, she rattled us down into Richmond. Getting sharply round the corner, she pretty nearly had a wheel taken off by the omnibus that was standing in front of the King's Head, and just escaped knocking down a youth in white costume and boating shoes, who jumped back on the pavement with an admirable dexterity. Nor would she stop to give us a look at the Thames from the bridge—we only caught a glimpse of the broad bend of the water, the various boats and their white-clad crews, the pleasant river-paths, and the green and wooded heights all around. She swept us on along the road leading into Twickenham, past the abodes of the Orleanist Princes, and into the narrow streets of the village itself, until, with a proud and defiant air, she pulled the horses up in front of Dr. Ashburton's house.

There *was* a young man at the window. She pretended not to see him.

When the servants had partly got our luggage out, the young man made his appearance, and came forward, in rather a frightened way, as I thought, to pay his respects to my Lady Tita and Bell. Then he glanced at the Uhlan, who was carefully examining

the horses' fetlocks and hoofs. Finally, as the Doctor had no stables, Master Arthur informed us that he had made arrangements about putting up the horses; and while the rest of us went into the house, he volunteered to take the phaeton round to the inn. He and the Count went off together.

Then there was a wild commotion on the first landing, a confused tumble and rush down stairs, and presently Bell and Tita were catching up two boys and hugging them, and pulling out all sorts of mysterious presents.

"Heh! how fens tee, Jeck? gaily?" cried Auntie Bell, whose broad Cumberlandshire vastly delighted the youngsters. "Why, Twom, thou's growin' a big lad,—thou mud as weel be a sodger as at schuil. Can tee dance a whornpipe yet?—what, nowther o' ye? Dost think I's gaun to gie a siller watch to twa feckless fallows that canna dance a whornpipe?"

But here Bell's mouth was stopped by a multitude of kisses, and, having had to confess that the two silver watches were really in her pocket, she was drawn into the parlour by the two boys, and made to stand and deliver.

CHAPTER III.

"PRINZ EUGEN, DER EDLE RITTER."

"What can Tommy Onslow do?
He can drive a phaeton and two.
Can Tommy Onslow do no more?"

MEANWHILE, what had become of the Lieutenant and Arthur, and Castor and Pollux, to say nothing of the phaeton, which had now been transferred from its accustomed home in Surrey to spend a night under a shed in Twickenham? The crooked by-ways and narrow streets of that curious little village were getting rapidly darker under the falling dusk, and here and there orange lamps were beginning to shine in the blue-grey of the twilight, when I set out to discover the stable to which our horses had been confided. I had got but half-way to the public-house, when I met Arthur. The ordinarily mild and gentle face of this young man—which would be quite feminine in character, but for a soft, pale-yellow moustache—looked rather gloomy.

"Where is the Count?" I asked of him.

"Do you mean that German fellow?" he said.

The poor young man! It was easy to detect the cause of that half-angry contempt with which he spoke of our Lieutenant. It was jealousy with its green eyes and dark imaginings; and the evening, I could see, promised us a pretty spectacle of the farce of Bell and the Dragon. At present I merely requested Master Arthur to answer my question.

"Well," said he, with a fine expression of irony—the unhappy wretch! as if it were not quite obvious that he was more inclined to cry—"if you want to keep him out of the police-office, you'd better go down to the stables of the ——. He has raised a pretty quarrel there, I can tell you—kicked the ostler half across the yard—knocked heaps of things to smithereens—and is ordering everybody about, and fuming and swearing in a dozen different inarticulate languages. I wish you joy of your companion. You will have pleuty of adventures by the way; but what will you do with all the clocks you gather?"

"Go home, you stupid boy, and thank God you have not the gift of sarcasm. Bell is waiting for you. You will talk very sensibly to her, I daresay; but don't make any jokes—not for some years to come."

Arthur went his way into the twilight, as wretched a young man as there was that evening in Twickenham.

Now in front of the public-house, and adjoining the entrance into the yard, a small and excited crowd had collected of all the idlers and loungers who hang about the doors of a tavern. In the middle of them—as you could see when the yellow light from the window streamed through a chink in the cluster of human figures—there was a small, square-set, bandy-legged man, with a red waistcoat, a cropped head, and a peaked cap, with the peak turned sideways. He was addressing his companions alternately in an odd mixture of Buckinghamshire *patois* and Middlesex pronunciation, somewhat in this fashion:—

"I baint afeard of 'm, or any other darned furrener, the ——. An' I've looked arter awsses afore he wur born, and I'd like to see the mahn as 'll tell me what I don't know about 'm. I've kept my plaäce for fifteen yur, and I'll bet the coöt on my bahck as my missus 'll say, there niver wur a better in the plaäce; an' as fur thaht —— furrener in there, the law 'll teach him summut, or I'm werry much mistaken. Eh, Arry? Bain't I right?"

This impassioned appeal from the excited small man was followed by a general chorus of assent.

I made my way down the yard, between the shafts of dog-carts, and the poles of disabled omnibuses that

loomed from out the darkness of a long and low shed. Down at the foot of this narrow and dusky channel a stable-door was open, and the faint yellow light occasionally caught the figure of a man who was busy grooming a horse outside. As I picked my way over the rough stones, I could hear that he was occasionally interrupting the hissing noise peculiar to the work with a snatch of a song, carelessly sung in a deep and sufficiently powerful voice. What was it he sang?

"*Prinz Eugen, der edle Ritter*——hissssssss——*wollt' dem Kaiser wiedrum kriegen*——wo! my beauty—so ho!——*Stadt und Festung Belgarad!*——hold up, my lad! wo ho!"

"Hillo, Oswald, what are you about?"

"Oh, only looking after the horses," said our young Uhlan, slowly raising himself up.

He was in a remarkable state of undress—his coat, waistcoat, and collar having been thrown on the straw inside the stable—and he held in his hand a brush.

"The fellows at this inn they are very ignorant of horses, or very careless."

"I hear you have been kicking 'em all about the place."

"Why not? You go in to have a glass of beer and see the people. You come back to the stables. The man says he has fed the horses—it is a lie. He

says he has groomed them—it is a lie. *Jott in Himmel!* can I not see? Then I drive him away—I take out corn for myself, also some beans—he comes back—he is insolent—I fling him into the yard—he falls over the pail—he lies and groans—that is very good for him; it will teach him to mind his business, not to tell lies, and to steal the price of the corn."

I pointed out to this cool young person that if he went kicking insolent ostlers all over the country, he would get us into trouble.

"Is it not a shame they do not know their work? and that they will ruin good horses to steal a sixpence from you, yes?"

"Besides," I said, "it is not prudent to quarrel with an ostler, for you must leave your horses under his care; and if he should be ill-natured, he may do them a mischief during the night."

The Count laughed, as he untied the halter and led Pollux into a loose box.

"Do not be alarmed. I never allow any man to lock up my horses if I am among strangers. I do that myself. I will lock up this place and take the key, and to-morrow at six I will come round and see them fed. No! you must not object. It is a great pleasure of mine to look after horses, and I shall become friends with these two in a very few days. You must let me manage them always."

"And groom them twice a day?"

"*Nee, Jott bewahre!* When there is a man who can do it, I will not; but when there is no one, it is a very good thing to help yourself."

Lieutenant Oswald von Rosen had clearly learned how to conjugate the verb *requiriren* during his sojourn in Bohemia and in France. He made another raid on the corn and split beans, got up into the loft, and crammed down plenty of hay, and then bringing a heap of clean straw into the place, tossed it plentifully about the loose box devoted to Pollux, and about Castor's stall. Then he put on his upper vestments, brought away the candle, locked the door, and put the key in his pocket, humming all the time something about "*die dreimal hunderttausend Mann.*"

When we had got to the gate of the yard, he stalked up to the small crowd of idlers, and said—

"Which of you is the man who did tumble over the pail? Is it you, you little fellow? Well, you deserve much more than you got, yes; but here is a half-crown for you to buy sticking-plaster with."

The small ostler held back, but his companions, who perceived that the half-crown meant beer, urged him to go forward and take it; which he did, saying—

"Well, I doan't bear no malice."

"And next time that you have gentlemen's horses put into your stables, don't try to steal the price of

their corn," said the Lieutenant; and with that he turned and walked away.

"Who is the gentleman who came with me?" asked my young friend, as we went back to the house; "he is a nice young man, but he does not know the difference between hay and straw, and I begged him not to remain. And he would not drink the beer of this public-house; but that is the way of all you Englishmen—you are so particular about things, and always thinking of your health, and always thinking of living, instead of living and thinking nothing about it. Ah, you do not know how fine a thing it is to live until you have been in a campaign, my dear friend; and then you know how fine it is that you can eat with great hunger, and how fine it is when you get a tumbler of wine, and how fine it is to sleep. You are very glad, then, to be able to walk firm on your legs, and find yourself alive and strong. But always, I think, your countrymen do not enjoy being alive so much as mine; they are always impatient for something, trying to do something, hoping for something, instead of being satisfied of finding every day a good new day, and plenty of satisfaction in it, with talking to people, and seeing things, and a cigar now and again. Just now, when I wake, I laugh to myself, and say, 'How very good it is to sleep in a bed, and shut yourself out from noise, and get up when you

please!' Then you have a good breakfast, and all the day begins afresh, and you have no fear of being crippled and sent off to the hospital. Oh! it is very good to have this freedom—this carelessness—this seeing of new things and new people every day. And that is a very pretty young lady become, your Miss Bell: I do remember her only a shy little girl, who spoke German with your strange English way of pronouncing the vowels, and was very much bashful over it. Oh yes, she is very good-looking indeed; her hair looks as if there were streaks of sunshine in the light brown of it, and her eyes are very thoughtful, and she has a beautiful outline of the chin that makes her neck and throat very pretty. And, you know, I rather like the nose not hooked, like most of your English young ladies; when it is a little the other way, and fine, and delicate it makes the face piquant and tender, not haughty and cold, *nicht wahr?* But she is very English-looking; I would take her as a—as a—a—type, do you call it?—of the pretty young Englishwoman, well-formed, open-eyed, with good healthy colour in her face, and very frank and gentle, and independent all at the same time. Oh, she is a very good girl—a very good girl, I can see that."

"Yes," I said, "I think she will marry that young fellow whom you saw to-night."

"And that will be very good for him," he replied,

easily; "for she will look after him and give him some common sense. He is not practical; he has not seen much; he is moody, and nervous, and thinks greatly about trifles. But I think he will be very amiable to her, and that is much. You know, all the best women marry stupid men."

There was, however, no need for our going into that dangerous subject; for at this moment we arrived at Dr. Ashburton's house. Von Rosen rushed upstairs to his room, to remove the traces of his recent employment; and then, as we both entered the drawing-room, we found Bell standing right under the central gaselier, which was pouring its rays down on her wealth of golden-brown hair. Indeed, she then deserved all that Von Rosen had said about her being a type of our handsomest young Englishwomen—rather tall, well-formed, showing a clear complexion, and healthy rosiness in her cheeks, while there was something at once defiant and gentle in her look. Comely enough she was to attract the notice of any stranger; but it was only those who had spent years with her, and had observed all her winning ways, her unselfishness, and the rare honour and honesty that lay behind all her pretty affectations of petulance, who could really tell what sort of young person our Bonny Bell was. She was sufficiently handsome to draw eyes towards her,—

"But if ye saw that which no eyes can see,
The inward beauty of her lovely spirit,
Garnished with heavenly gifts of high degree,
Much more then would ye wonder at that sight.
* * * * *
There dwell sweet Love and constant Chastity,
Unspotted Faith, and comely Womanhood,
Regard of Honour, and mild Modesty."

And it must be said that during this evening Bell's conduct was beyond all praise. Arthur Ashburton was rather cold and distant towards her, and was obviously in a bad temper. He even hovered on the verge of rudeness towards both herself and the Lieutenant. Now, nothing delighted Bell more than to vary the even and pleasant tenor of her life with a series of pretty quarrels which had very little element of seriousness in them; but on this evening, when she was provoked into quarrelling in earnest, nothing could exceed the good sense, and gentleness, and forbearance she showed. At dinner she sat between the young barrister and his father, a quiet, little white-haired man in spectacles, with small black eyes that twinkled strangely when he made his nervous little jokes, and looked over to his wife—the very matter-of-fact and roseate woman who sat at the opposite end of the table. The old Doctor was a much more pleasant companion than his son; but Bell, with wonderful moderation, did her best to re-establish good relations between the moody young barrister and herself. Of

course, no woman will prolong such overtures indefinitely; and at last the young gentleman managed to establish a more serious breach than he had dreamed of. For the common talk had drifted back to the then recent war, and our Lieutenant was telling us a story about three Uhlanen, who had, out of mere bravado, ridden down the main street of a French village, and out at the other end, without having been touched by the shots fired at them, when young Ashburton added with a laugh—

"I suppose they were so padded with the watches and jewellery they had gathered on their way, that the bullets glanced off."

Count von Rosen looked across the table at this young man, with a sort of wonder in his eyes; and then, with admirable self-control, he turned to my Lady Tita, and calmly continued the story.

But as for Bell, a blush of shame and exceeding mortification overspread her features. No madness of jealousy could excuse this open insult to a stranger and a guest. From that moment, Bell addressed herself exclusively to the old Doctor, and took no more notice of his son than if he had been in the moon. She was deeply hurt, but she managed to conceal her disappointment; and indeed, when the boys came in after dinner, she had so far picked up her spirits as to be able to talk to them in that wild way which they

regarded with mingled awe and delight. For they could not understand how Auntie Bell was allowed to use strange words, and even talk Cumberlandshire to the Doctor's own face.

Of course she plied the boys with all sorts of fruit and sweetmeats, until Tita, coming suddenly back from the campaign in France to the table before her, peremptorily ordered her to cease. Then Bell gathered round her the decanters; the boys had their half-glass of wine; and Bell swept them away with her into the drawing-room, when the women left.

"A very bright young lady—hm!—a very bright and pleasant young lady indeed," said the Doctor, stretching out his short legs with an air of freedom, and beginning to examine the decanters. "I don't wonder the young fellows rave about her; eh, Arthur, eh?"

Master Arthur rose and left the room.

"Touched, eh?" said the father, with his eyes twinkling vehemently, and his small grey features twisted into a smile. "Hit hard, eh? Gad, I don't wonder at it; if I were a young fellow myself—eh, eh? Claret? Yes. But the young fellows now don't sing about their laughing Lalage, or drink to Glycera, or make jokes with Lydia; it is all dreaming, and reading, and sighing, eh, eh? That boy of mine has gone mad—heeds nothing—is ill-tempered——"

"Very much so, Doctor."

"Eh? Ill-tempered? Why, his mother daren't talk to him, and we're glad to have him go up to his chambers again. Our young friend here is of another sort; there is no care about a woman tempering the healthy brown of the sun and the weather, eh?—is there, eh?"

"Why, my dear Doctor," cried the Lieutenant, with a prodigious laugh, "don't you think Lydia's lover—*Lydia, dic,* you know—he was very glad to be away from rough sports? He had other enjoyments. I am brown, not because of my wish, but that I have been made to work—that is all."

The Doctor was overjoyed, and, perhaps, a trifle surprised, to find that this tall Uhlan, who had just been grooming two horses, understood his references to Horace; and he immediately cried out—

"No, no; you must not lose your health, and your colour, and your temper. Would you have your friends say of you, who have just been through a campaign in France—

> 'Cur neque militaris
> Inter æquales militat, Gallica nec lupatis
> Temperat ora frenis?'

Eh, eh?"

"*Temperat ora frenis*—it is a good motto for our driving excursion," said the Lieutenant; "but was it your Miss Bell who called your two fine horses by such stupid names as Castor and Pollux?"

"Nevertheless," said the Doctor, eagerly, "Castor was said to have great skill in the management of horses,—eh, eh?"

"Certainly," said the Lieutenant. "And both together they foretell good weather, which is a fine thing in driving."

"And they were the gods of boundaries," cried the Doctor.

"And they got people out of trouble when everything seemed all over," returned the Count; "which may also happen to our phaeton."

"And—and—and"—here the Doctor's small face fairly gleamed with a joke, and he broke into a thin, high chuckle—"they ran away with two ladies—eh, eh, eh?—did they not, did they not?"

Presently we went into the drawing-room, and there the women were found in a wild maze of maps, eagerly discussing the various routes to the North, and the comparative attractions of different towns. The contents of Mr. Stanford's shop seemed to have been scattered about the room, and Bell had armed herself with an opisometer, which gave her quite an air of importance.

The Lieutenant was out of this matter, so he flung himself down into an easy chair, and presently had both of the boys on his knees, telling them stories and propounding arithmetical conundrums alternately.

When Queen Tita came to release him, the young rebels refused to go; and one of them declared that the Count had promised to sing the "Wacht am Rhein."

"Oh, please, don't," said Bell, suddenly turning round, with a map of Cumberland half hiding her. "You don't know that all the organs here have it. But if you would be so very kind as to sing us a German song, I will play the accompaniment for you, if I know it, and I know a great many."

Of course, the women did not imagine that a man who had been accustomed to a soldier's life, and who had just betrayed a faculty for grooming horses, was likely to know much more of music than a handy chorus; but the Count, lightly saying he would not trouble her, went over to the piano, and sat down unnoticed amid the general hum of conversation.

But the next moment there was sufficient silence. For with a crash like thunder—"Hei! das klang wie Ungewitter!"—the young Lieutenant struck the first chords of "Prinz Eugen," and with a sort of upward toss of the head, as if he were making room for himself, he began to sing Freiligrath's picturesque soldier-song to the wild and warlike and yet stately music which Dr. Löwe has written for it. What a rare voice he had, too!—deep, strong, and resonant—that seemed to throw itself into the daring spirit of the music with an absolute disregard of delicate graces or sentimental

effect; a powerful, masculine, soldier-like voice, that had little flute-like softness, but the strength and thrill that told of a deep chest, and that interpenetrated or rose above the loudest chords that his ten fingers struck. Queen Tita's face was overspread with surprise; Bell unconsciously laid down the map, and stood as one amazed. The ballad, you know, tells how, one calm night on the banks of the Danube, just after the great storming of Belgrade, a young trumpeter in the camp determines to leave aside cards for a while, and make a right good song for the army to sing; how he sets to work to tell the story of the battle in ringing verse, and at last, when he has got the rhymes correct, he makes the notes too, and his song is complete. "Ho, ye white troops and ye red troops, come round and listen!" he cries; and then he sings the record of the great deeds of Prince Eugene: and lo! as he repeats the air for the third time, there breaks forth, with a hoarse roar as of thunder, the chorus "Prinz Eugen der edle Ritter!" until the sound of it is carried even into the Turkish camp. And then the young trumpeter, not dissatisfied with his performance, proudly twirls his moustache; and finally sneaks away to tell of his triumph to the pretty Marketenderin. When our young Uhlan rose from the piano, he laughed in an apologetic fashion; but there was still in his face some of that glow and fire which had made him forget himself during the

singing of the ballad, and which had lent to his voice that penetrating resonance that still seemed to linger about the room. Bell said "Thank you" in rather a timid way; but Queen Tita did not speak at all, and seemed to have forgotten us.

We had more music that evening, and Bell produced her guitar, which was expected to solace us much on our journey. It was found that the Lieutenant could play that too in a rough fashion; and he executed at least a very pretty accompaniment when Bell sang "Der Tyroler und sein Kind." But you should have seen the face of Master Arthur when Bell volunteered to sing a German song. I believe she did it to show that she was not altogether frightened by the gloomy and mysterious silence which he preserved, as he sat in a corner and stared at everybody.

So ended our first day: and to-morrow—why, to-morrow we pass away from big cities and their suburbs, from multitudes of friends, late hours, and the whirl of amusements and follies, into the still seclusion of English country life, with its simple habits, and fresh pictures, and the quaint humours of its inns.

[*Note by Queen Titania.*—"The foregoing pages give a more or less accurate account of our setting-out, but they are *all wrong* about Bell. Men are far worse than women in imagining love-affairs, and supposing that girls think about nothing else. Bell wishes *to be let alone.* If gentlemen care to make themselves uncomfortable about her, she cannot help it; but it is rather *unfair* to drag her into any such

complications. I am *positive* that, though she has doubtless a little pity for that young man who vexes himself and his friends because he is not good enough for her, she would not be sorry to see him, and Count von Rosen—*and some one else besides*—all start off on a cruise to Australia. She is quite content to be as she is. Marriage will come in good time; and when it comes, she will get plenty of it, *sure enough*. In the meantime, I hope she will not be suspected of encouraging those idle flirtations and pretences of worship with which gentlemen think they ought to approach every girl whose *good fortune it is* not to be married.—T."]

CHAPTER IV.

ARTHUR VANISHES.

"Hampton me taught to wish her first for mine;
And Windsor, alas! doth chase me from her sight."

"RAIN!" cried Queen Titania, as she walked up to the window of the breakfast-room, and stared reproachfully out on cloudy skies, gloomy trees, and the wet thoroughfares of Twickenham.

"Surely not!" said Bell, in anxious tones; and therewith she too walked up to one of the panes, while an expression of deep mortification settled down on her face.

She stood so for a second or two, irresolute and hurt, and then a revengeful look came into her eyes; she walked firmly over to my Lady, got close up to her ear, and apparently uttered a single word. Tita almost jumped back; and then she looked at the girl.

"Bell, how dare you?" she said, in her severest manner.

Bell turned and shyly glanced at the rest of us, probably to make sure none of us had heard; and then, all this mysterious transaction being brought to a close, she returned to the table and calmly took up a newspaper. But presently she threw it aside, and glanced, with some heightened colour in her face and some half-frightened amusement in her eyes, towards Tita; and lo! that majestic little woman was still regarding the girl, and there was surprise as well as sternness in her look.

Presently the brisk step of Lieutenant von Rosen was heard outside, and in a minute or two the tall young man came into the room, with a fine colour in his face, and a sprinkling of rain about his big brown beard.

"Ha! Not late? No? That is very good!"

"But it rains!" said Tita to him, in an injured way, as if anyone who had been out of doors was necessarily responsible for the weather.

"Not much," he said. "It may go off; but about six it did rain very hard, and I got a little wet then, I think."

"And where were you at six?" said Tita, with her pretty brown eyes opened wide.

"At Isleworth," he said, carelessly; and then he added: "Oh, I have done much business this morning, and bought something for your two boys, which will

make them not mind that you go away. It is hard, you know, they are left behind——"

"But Bell has given them silver watches!" said Mamma. "Is not that enough?"

"They will break them in a day. Now when I went to the stables this morning to feed the horses, the old ostler was there. We had a quarrel last night; but no matter. We became very good friends—he told me much about Buckinghamshire and himself—he told me he did know your two boys—he told me he knew of a pony—oh! a very nice little pony—that was for sale from a gentleman in Isleworth——"

"And you've bought them a pony!" cried Bell, clapping her hands.

"Bell," said Tita, with a severe look, "how foolish you are! How could you think of anything so absurd?"

"But she is quite right, Madame," said the Lieutenant, "and it will be here in an hour, and you must not tell them till it comes."

"And you mean to leave them with that animal! Why, they will break their necks, both of them," cried my Lady.

"Oh no!" said the Lieutenant; "a tumble does not hurt boys, not at all. And this is a very quiet, small pony—oh, I did pull him about to try, and he will not harm anybody. And very rough and strong—I think the old man did call him a Scotland pony."

"A Shetland pony."

"Ah, very well," said our Uhlan; and then he began to turn wistful eyes to the breakfast table.

They sat down to breakfast, almost forgetting the rain. They were very well pleased with the coming of the pony. It would be a capital thing for the boys' health; it would be this and would be that; but only one person there reflected that this addition to the comforts of the young rogues upstairs would certainly cost him sixteen shillings a week all the year round.

Suddenly, in the midst of this talk, Bell looked up and said—

"But where is Arthur?"

"Oh," said the mother of the young man, "he went up to town this morning at eight. He took it for granted you would not start to-day."

"He might have waited to see," said Bell, looking down. "I suppose he is not so very much occupied in the Temple. What if we have to go away before he comes back?"

"But perhaps he won't come back," said Mrs. Ashburton, gently.

Bell looked surprised; and then, with a little firmness about the mouth, held her peace for some time. It was clear that Master Arthur's absence had some considerable significance in it, which she was slowly determining in her own mind.

When Bell next spoke, she proposed that we should set out, rain or no rain.

"It will not take much time to drive down to Henley," she said. "And if we begin by paying too much attention to slight showers, we shall never get on. Besides, Count von Rosen ought to see how fine are our English rain landscapes—what softened colours are brought out in the trees and in the greys of the distance under a dark sky. It is not nearly so dismal as a wet day abroad, in a level country, with nothing but rows of poplars along the horizon. Here," she said, turning to the Lieutenant, who had probably heard of her recent successes in water-colour, "you have light mists hanging about the woods; and there is a rough surface on the rivers; and all the hedges and fields get dark and intense, and a bit of scarlet—say a woman's cloak—is very fine under the gloom of the sky. I know you are not afraid of wet, and I know that the rest of us never got into such good spirits during our Surrey drives as when we were dashing through torrents and shaking the rain from about our faces; and this is nothing—a mere passing shower—and the country down by Hounslow will look very well under dark clouds; and we cannot do better than start at once for Henley!"

"What is the matter, Bell?" said Tita, looking at the girl with her clear, observant eyes. "One would think you were vexed about our staying in Twickenham

until to-morrow, and yet nobody has proposed that yet."

"I don't wish to waste time," said Bell, looking down.

Here the Lieutenant laughed aloud.

"Forgive me, Mademoiselle," he said, "but what you say is very much like the English people. They are always much afraid of losing time, though it does not matter to them. I think your commercial habits have become national, and got amongst people who have nothing to do with commerce. I find English ladies who have weeks and months at their disposal travel all night by train, and make themselves very wretched. Why? To save a day, they tell you. I find English people, with two months' holiday before them, undertake all the uncomforts of a night-passage from Dover to Calais. Why? To save a day. How does it matter to you, for example, that we start to-day, or to-morrow, or next week? Only that you feel you must be doing something—you must accomplish something—you must save time. It is all English. It is with your amusements as with your making of money. You are never satisfied. You are always looking forward—wishing to do or have certain things—never content to stop, and rest, and enjoy doing nothing."

Now what do you think our Bell did on being lectured in this fashion? Say something in reply, only kept from being saucy by the sweet manner of her

saying it? Or rise and leave the room, and refuse to be coaxed into a good humour for hours? Why, no. She said in the gentlest way—

"I think you are right, Count von Rosen. It really does not matter to me whether we go to-day or to-morrow."

"But you shall go to-day, Bell," say I, "even though it should rain Duke Georges. At four of the clock we start."

"My dear," says Tita, "this is absurd."

"Probably; but none the less Castor and Pollux shall start at that hour."

"You are beginning to show your authority somewhat early," says my Lady, with a suspicious sweetness in her tone.

"What there is left of it," I remark, looking at Bell, who descries a fight in the distance, and is all attention.

"Count von Rosen," says Tita, turning in her calmest manner to the young man, "what do you think of this piece of folly? It may clear up long before that: it may be raining heavily then. Why should we run the risk of incurring serious illness by determining to start at a particular hour? It is monstrous. It is absurd. It is——it is——"

"Well," said the Lieutenant, with an easy shrug and a laugh, "it is not of much consequence you make the rule; for you will break it if it is not agreeable.

For myself, I have been accustomed to start at a particular hour, whatever happens; but for pleasure, what is the use?"

"Yes, what is the use?" repeats Titania, turning to the rest of us with a certain ill-concealed air of triumph.

"St. Augustine," I observed to this rebellious person, "remarks that the obedience of a wife to her husband is no virtue, so long as she does only that which is reasonable, just, and pleasing to herself."

"I don't believe St. Augustine said anything of the kind," replied she; "and if he did, he hadn't a wife, and didn't know what he was talking about. I will not allow Bell to catch her death of cold. We shall *not* start at four."

"Two o'clock, luncheon. Half-past two the moon enters Capricorn. Three o'clock, madness rages. Four, colds attack the human race. We start at four."

By this time breakfast was over, and all the reply that Tita vouchsafed was to wear a pleased smile of defiance as she left the room. The Count, too, went out; and in a few minutes we saw him in the road, leading the pony he had bought. The boys had been kept upstairs, and were told nothing of the surprise in store for them; so that we were promised a stirring scene in front of the Doctor's house.

Presently the Lieutenant arrived at the gate, and summoned Bell from the window. She having gone

to the door, and spoken to him for a second or two, went into the house, and reappeared with a bundle of coarse cloths. Was the foolish young man going to groom the pony in front of the house, merely out of bravado? At all events, he roughly dried the shaggy coat of the sturdy little animal, and then carefully wiped the mud from its small legs and hoofs. Bell went down and took the bridle; the Lieutenant was behind, to give a push if necessary.

"Come up, Dick!" she said; and after a few frightened stumbles on the steps the pony stood in the Doctor's hall!

The clatter of the small hoofs on the waxcloth had brought the boys out to the first landing, and they were looking down with intense surprise on the appearance of a live horse in the house. When Bell had called them and told them that the Count had bought this pony for them, that it was a real pony, and that they would have to feed it every day, they came down the stairs with quite a frightened air. They regarded the animal from a distance, and then at last Master Jack ventured to go up and touch its neck.

"Why," he said, as if suddenly struck with the notion that it was really alive, "I'll get it an apple!"

He went upstairs, three steps at a bound; and by the time he came back Master Tom had got in the saddle, and was for riding his steed into the breakfast-

room. Then he would ride him out into the garden. Jack insisted on his having the apple first. The mother of both called out from above that if they went into the garden in the rain she would have the whole house whipped. But all the same, Master Tom, led by the Lieutenant and followed by Bell—whose attentions in holding him on he regarded with great dislike—rode in state along the passage, and through the kitchen, and out by a back door into the garden.

"Let me go, Auntie Bell!" he said, shaking himself free. "I can ride very well—I have ridden often at Leatherhead."

"Off you go, then," said the Lieutenant: "lean well back—don't kick him with your heels—off you go."

The pony shook his rough little mane, and started upon a very sedate and patient walk along the smooth path.

"Fist! Hei! Go ahead!" cried Master Tom, and he twitched at the bridle in quite a knowing way.

Thus admonished, the pony broke into a brisk trot, which at first jogged Master Tom on to its neck, but he managed to wriggle back into the saddle and get hold of the reins again. His riding was not a masterly performance, but at all events he stuck on; and when, after having trotted thrice round the garden, he slid off of his own will and brought the pony up to us, his chubby round face was gleaming with pride,

and flushed colour, and rain. Then it was Jack's turn; but this young gentleman, having had less experience, was attended by the Lieutenant, who walked round the garden with him, and gave him his first lessons in the art of horsemanship. This was a very pretty amusement for those of us who remained under the archway; but for those in the garden it was beginning to prove a trifle damp. Nevertheless, Bell begged hard for the boys to be let alone, seeing that they were overjoyed beyond expression by their new toy; and it is probable that both they and their instructor would have got soaked to the skin had not my Lady Titania appeared, with her face full of an awful wrath.

What occurred then it is difficult to relate; for in the midst of the storm Bell laughed; and the boys, being deprived of their senses by the gift of the pony, laughed also—at their own mother. Tita fell from her high estate directly. The splendours of her anger faded away from her face, and she ran out into the rain and cuffed the boys' ears, and kissed them, and drove them into the house before her. And she was so good as to thank the Count formally for his present; and with a kindly smile bade the boys be good boys and attend to their lessons when they had so much amusement provided for them; and finally turned to Bell, and said, that as we had to start at four o'clock, we might as well have our things packed before luncheon.

Now such was the reward of this wifely obedience that at four o'clock the rain had actually and definitely ceased; and the clouds, though they still hung low, were gathering themselves up into distinct forms. When the phaeton was brought round, there was not even any necessity for putting up the hood; and Tita, having seen that everything was placed in the vehicle, was graciously pleased to ask the Lieutenant if he would drive, that she might sit beside him and point out objects of interest.

Then she kissed the boys very affectionately, and bade them take care not to tumble off the pony. The Doctor and his wife wished us every good fortune. Bell threw a wistful glance up and down the road, and then turned her face a little aside. The Count shook the reins, and our phaeton rolled slowly away from Twickenham.

"Why, Bell," I said, as we were crossing the railway bridge, and my companion looked round to see if there were a train at the station, "you have been crying."

"Not much," said Bell, frankly, but in a very low voice.

"But why?" I ask.

"You know," she said.

"I know that Arthur has been very unreasonable, and that he has gone up to London in a fit of temper; and I know what I think of the whole transaction,

and what I consider he deserves. But I didn't think you cared for him so much, Bell, or were so vexed about it."

"Care for him?" she said, with a glance at the people before us, lest the low sound of her voice might not be entirely drowned by the noise of the wheels in the muddy road. "That may mean much or little. You know I like Arthur very well; and—and I am afraid he is vexed with me; and it is not pleasant to part like that with one's friends."

"He will write to you, Bell; or he will drop down on us suddenly some evening when we are at Oxford, or Worcester, or Shrewsbury——"

"I hope he will not do that," said Bell, with some expression of alarm. "If he does, I know something dreadful will happen."

"But Master Arthur, Bell, is not exactly the sort of person to displace the geological strata."

"Oh, you don't know what a temper he has at times," she said; and then, suddenly recovering herself, she added hastily, "but he is exceedingly good and kind for all that: only he is vexed, you know, at not being able to get on; and perhaps he is a little jealous of people who are successful, and in good circumstances, and independent; and he is apt to think that—that—that——"

"His lady-love will be carried off by some wealthy suitor before he has been able to amass a fortune?"

"You mustn't talk as if I were engaged to Arthur Ashburton," said Bell, rather proudly, "or even that I am ever likely to be."

Our Bonny Bell soon recovered her spirits, for she felt that we had at last really set out on our journey to Scotland, and her keen liking for all out-of-door sights and sounds was now heightened by a vague and glad anticipation. If Arthur Ashburton, as I deemed highly probable, should endeavour to overtake us, and effect a reconciliation or final understanding with Bell, we were, for the present at least, speeding rapidly away from him.

As we drove through the narrow lane running down by Whitton Park and Whitton Dean, the warm, moist winds were blowing a dozen odours about from the far, low-stretching fields and gardens; and the prevailing sweetness of the air seemed to herald our departure from the last suburban traces of London. Splash! went the horses' hoofs into the yellow pools of the roads, and the rattle of the wheels seemed to send an echo through the stillness of the quiet country-side; while overhead the dark and level clouds became more fixed and grey, and we hoped they would ultimately draw together and break, so as to give us a glimpse of pallid sunshine. Then we drove up through Hounslow to the famous inn at the cross-roads which was known to travellers in the highway-robbery days; and here

our Bell complained that so many of these hostelries should bear her name. Tita, we could hear, was telling her companion of all the strange incidents connected with this inn and its neighbourhood which she could recall from the pages of those various old-fashioned fictions which are much more interesting to some folks than the most accurate histories. So we bowled along the Bath road, over Cranford Bridge, past the Magpies, through Colnbrook, and on to Langley Marsh, when the Count suddenly exclaimed—

"But the Heath? I have not seen Hounslow Heath, where the highwaymen used to be!"

Alas! there was no more Heath to show him—only the level and wooded beauties of a cultivated English plain. And yet these, as we saw them then, under the conditions that Bell had described in the morning, were sufficiently pleasant to see. All around us stretched a fertile landscape, with the various greens of its trees and fields and hedges grown dark and strong under the gloom of the sky. The winding road ran through this country like the delicate grey streak of a river: and there were distant farmhouses peeping from the sombre foliage; an occasional wayside inn standing deserted amid its rude outhouses; a passing tramp plodding through the mire. Strange and sweet came the damp, warm winds from over the fields of beans and of clover, and it seemed as if the wild-roses in the tall and

straggling hedges had increased in multitude so as to perfume the whole land. And then, as we began to see in the west, with a great joy, some faint streaks of sunshine descend like a shimmering comb upon the gloomy landscape, lo! in the south there arose before us a great and stately building, whose tall grey towers and spacious walls, seen against the dark clouds of the horizon, were distant, and pale, and spectral.

"It looks like a phantom castle, does it not?" said Bell, speaking in quite a low voice. "Don't you think it has sprung up in the heavens like the Fata Morgana, or the spectral ship, and that it will fade away again and disappear?"

Indeed it looked like the ghost of one of the castles of King Arthur's time—that old, strange time, when England lay steeped in grey mists and the fogs blown about by the sea-winds, when there does not seem to have been any sunshine, but only a gloom of shifting vapours, half hiding the ghostly knights and the shadowy queens, and all their faint and mystical stories and pilgrimages and visions. The castle down there looked as if it had never been touched by sharp, clear, modern sunlight, that is cruel to ghosts and phantoms.

But here Bell's reveries were interrupted by Lieutenant von Rosen, who, catching sight of the castle in the south and all its hazy lines of forest, said—

"Ah, what is that?"

"That," said Bell, suddenly recovering from her trance, "is a hotel for German princes."

She had no sooner uttered the words, however, than she looked thoroughly alarmed; and with a prodigious shame and mortification she begged the Count's pardon, who merely laughed, and said he regretted he was not a prince.

"It is Windsor, is it not?" he said.

"Yes," replied Bell humbly, while her face was still pained and glowing. "I—I hope you will forgive my rudeness: I think I must have heard some one say that recently, and it escaped me before I thought what it meant."

Of course, the Lieutenant passed the matter off lightly, as a very harmless saying; but all the same Bell seemed determined for some time after to make him amends, and quite took away my Lady's occupation by pointing out to our young Uhlan, in a very respectful and submissive manner, whatever she thought of note on the road. Whether the Lieutenant perceived this intention or not, I do not know; but at all events he took enormous pains to be interested in what she said, and paid far more attention to her than to his own companion. Moreover he once or twice, in looking back, pretty nearly ran us into a cart, insomuch that Queen Tita had laughingly to recall him to his duties.

In this wise we went down through the sweetly-smelling country, with its lines of wood and hedge and its breadths of field and meadow still suffering from the gloom of a darkened sky. We cut through the village of Slough, passed the famous Salthill, got over the Two Mill Brook at Cuckfield Bridge, and were rapidly nearing Maidenhead, where we proposed to rest an hour or two and dine. Bell had pledged her word there would be a bright evening, and had thrown out vague hints about a boating excursion up to the wooded heights of Cliefden. In the meantime the sun had made little way in breaking through the clouds. There were faint indications here and there of a luminous greyish-yellow lying in the interstices of the heavy sky; but the pale and shimmering comb in the west had disappeared.

"What has come over your fine weather, Bell?" said my Lady. "Do you remember how you used to dream of our setting out, and what heaps of colour and sunshine you lavished on your picture?"

"My dear," said Bell, "you are unacquainted with the art of a stage-manager. Do you think I would begin my pantomime with a blaze of light, and bright music, and a great show of costume? No! First of all comes the dungeon scene—darkness and gloom—thunder and solemn music—nothing but demons appearing through the smoke; and then, when you have

all got impressed and terrified and attentive, you will hear in the distance a little sound of melody, there will be a flutter of wings, just as if the fairies were preparing a surprise, and then all at once into the darkness leaps the queen herself, and a blaze of sunlight dashes on to her silver wings, and you see her gauzy costume, and the scarlet and gold of a thousand attendants who have all swarmed into the light."

"How long have we to wait, Mademoiselle?" said the Lieutenant, seriously.

"I have not quite settled that," replied Bell, with a fine air of reflection, "but I will see about it while you are having dinner."

Comforted by these promises—which ought, however, to have come from Queen Titania, if the fairies were supposed to be invoked—we drove underneath the railway-line and past the station of Taplow, and so forward to the hotel by the bridge. When, having with some exercise of patience seen Castor and Pollux housed and fed, I went into the parlour, I found dinner on the point of being served, and the Count grown almost eloquent about the comforts of English inns. Indeed, there was a considerable difference, as he pointed out, between the hard, bright, cheery public-room of a German inn, and this long, low-roofed apartment, with its old-fashioned furniture, its carpets, and general air of gravity and respectability. Then

the series of pictures around the walls—venerable lithographs, glazed and yellow, representing all manner of wild adventures in driving and hunting—amused him much.

"That is very like your English humour," he said,—"of the country, I mean. The joke is a man thrown into a ditch, and many horses coming over on him; or it is a carriage upset in the road, and men crawling from underneath, and women trying to get through the window. It is rough, strong, practical fun, at the expense of unfortunate people, that you like."

"At least," I point out, "it is quite as good a sort of public-house furniture as pictures of bleeding saints, or lithographs of smooth-headed princes."

"Oh, I do not object to it," he said, "not in the least. I do like your sporting pictures very much."

"And when you talk of German lithographs," struck in Bell, quite warmly, "I suppose you know that it is to the German printsellers our poorer classes owe all the possession of art they can afford. They would never have a picture in their house but for those cheap lithographs that come over from Germany; and, although they are very bad, and even carelessly bad often, they are surely better than nothing for cottages and country inns that would never otherwise have anything to show but coarse patterns of wall-paper."

"My dear child," remarked Queen Tita, "we

are none of us accusing Germany of any crime whatever."

"But it is very good-natured of Mademoiselle to defend my country, for all that," said the Lieutenant, with a smile. "We are unpopular with you just now, I believe. That I cannot help. It is a pity. But it is only a family quarrel, you know, and it will go away. And just now, it requires some courage to say a word for Germany, yes?"

"Why, Bell has been your bitterest enemy all through the war," said Tita, ashamed of the defection of her ancient ally.

"I think you behaved very badly to the poor French people," said Bell, looking down, and evidently wishing that some good spirit or bad one would fly away with this embarrassing topic.

The spirit appeared. There came to the open space in front of the inn a young girl of about fifteen or sixteen, with a careworn and yet healthily-coloured face, and shrewd blue eyes. She wore a man's jacket, and she had a shillelagh in her hand, which she twirled about as she glanced at the windows of the inn. Then, in a hard, cracked voice, she began to sing a song. It was supposed to be rather a dashing and aristocratic ballad, in which this oddly-clad girl with the shillelagh recounted her experiences of the opera, and told us how she loved champagne, and

croquet, and various other fashionable diversions. There was something very curious in the forced gaiety with which she entered into these particulars, the shillelagh meanwhile being kept as still as circumstances would permit. But presently she sang an Irish song, describing herself as some free and easy Irish lover and fighter; and here the bit of wood came into play. She thrust one of her hands, with an audacious air, into the pocket of the jacket she wore, while she twirled the shillelagh with the other; and then, so soon as she had finished, her face dropped into a plaintive and matter-of-fact air, and she came forward to receive pence.

"She is scarcely our Lorelei," said the Count, "who sits over the Rhine in the evening. But she is a hard-working girl, you can see that. She has not much pleasure in life. If we give her a shilling, it will be much comfort to her."

And with that he went out. But what was Tita's surprise to see him go up to the girl and begin to talk to her! She, looking up to the big, brown-bearded man with a sort of awe, answered his questions with some appearance of shamefaced embarrassment: and then, when he gave her a piece of money, she performed something like a curtsey, and looked after him as he returned whistling to the door of the inn.

Then we had dinner—a plain, comfortable, wholesome

meal enough; and it seemed somehow in this old-fashioned parlour that we formed quite a family party. We were cut off at last from the world of friends and acquaintances, and thrown upon each other's society in a very peculiar fashion. In what manner should we sit down to our final repast, after all this journey and its perils and accidents were over? Tita, I could see, was rather grave, and perhaps speculating on the future; while Bell and the young Lieutenant had got to talk of some people they recollected as living at Bonn some dozen years before. Nobody said a word about Arthur.

CHAPTER V.

QUEEN TITANIA AFLOAT.

"Say, Father Thames, for thou hast seen
Full many a sprightly race,
Disporting on thy margent green,
The paths of pleasure trace,
Who foremost now delight to cleave
With pliant arm thy glassy wave?"

At length we hit upon one thing that Count von Rosen could not do. When we had wandered down to the side of the Thames, just by Maidenhead Bridge, and opposite the fine old houses, and smooth lawns, and green banks that stand on the other margin of the broad and shallow river, we discovered that the Lieutenant was of no use in a boat. And so, as the young folks would have us go up under the shadows of the leafy hills of Cliefden, there was nothing for it but that Tita and I should resort to the habits of earlier years, and show a later generation how to feather an oar with skill and dexterity. As Queen Titania stood by the

boat-house, pulling off her gloves with economic forethought, and looking rather pensively at the landing-place and the boats and the water, she suddenly said—

"Is not this like long ago?"

"You talk like an old woman, Tita," says one of the party. "And yet your eyes are as pretty as they were a dozen years ago, when you used to walk along the beach at Eastbourne, and cry because you were afraid of becoming the mistress of a house. And now the house has been too much for you; and you are full of confused facts, and unintelligible figures, and petty anxieties, until your responsibilities have hidden away the old tenderness of your look, except at such a moment as this, when you forget yourself. Tita, do you remember who pricked her finger to sign a document when she was only a schoolgirl, and who produced it years afterwards with something of a shamefaced pride?"

"Stuff!" says Tita, angrily, but blushing dreadfully all the same; and so, with a frown and an imperious manner, she stepped down to the margin of the river.

Now mark this circumstance. In the old days of which my Lady was then thinking, she used to be very well content with pulling bow-oar when we two used to go out in the evenings. Now, when the Lieutenant and Bell had been comfortably placed in the stern, Tita daintily stepped into the boat and sat down quite

naturally to pull stroke. She made no apology. She took the place as if it were hers by right. Such are the changes which a few years of married life produce.

So Bell pulled the white tiller-ropes over her shoulder, and we glided out and up the glassy stream, into that world of greenness and soft sounds and sweet odours that lay all around. Already something of Bell's prophecy was likely to come true; for the clouds were perceptibly growing thinner overhead, and a diffused yellow light falling from no particular place seemed to dwell over the hanging woods of Cliefden. It gave a new look, too, to the smooth river, to the rounded elms and tall poplars on the banks, and the long aits beyond the bridge, where the swans were sailing close in by the reeds.

"Look out!" cried the Lieutenant, suddenly; and at the same moment our coxswain, without a word of warning, shot us into a half-submerged forest that seemed to hide from us a lake on the other side. Tita had so little time to ship her oar that no protest was possible; and then Von Rosen, catching hold of the branches, pulled us through the narrow channel, and lo! we were in a still piece of water, with a smooth curve of the river-bank on one side and a long island on the other, and with a pretty little house looking quietly down at us over this inland sea. We were still in the Thames; but this house seemed so entirely to have

become owner of the charming landscape around and its stretch of water in front, that Bell asked in a hurry how we could get away. Tita, being still a little indignant, answered not, but put her oar into the outrigger again, and commenced pulling. And then our coxswain, who was not so familiar with the tricks of the Thames at Maidenhead as some of us, discovered a north-west passage by which it was possible to return into the main channel of the stream, and we continued our voyage.

When, at length, we had got by the picturesque old mill, and reached the sea of tumbling white water that came rushing down from the weir, it seemed as though the sky had entered into a compact with Bell to fulfil her predictions. For as we lay and rocked in the surge —watching the long level line of foam come tumbling over in spouts and jets and white masses, listening to the roar of the fall, and regarding the swirling circles of white bells that swept away downward on the stream— there appeared in the west, just over the line of the weir, a parallel line of dark blood-red. It was but a streak as yet; but presently it widened and grew more intense—a great glow of crimson colour came shining forth—and it seemed as if all the western heavens, just over that line of white foam, were becoming a mass of fire. Bell's transformation-scene was positively blinding; and the bewilderment of the splendid

colours was not lessened by the roar of the tumbling river, that seemed strangely wild in the stillness of the evening.

But when we turned to drop quietly down the stream, the scene around us was so lovely that Queen Titania had no heart to pull away from it. For now the hanging woods of beech and birch and oak had caught a glow of the sunset along their masses of yellow and green, and the broad stream had the purple of its glassy sweeps dashed here and there with red; and in the far east a reflected tinge of pink mingled with the cold green, and lay soft and pure and clear over the low woods, and the river, and the bridge. As if by magic the world had grown suddenly light, ethereal, and full of beautiful colours; and the clouds that still remained overhead had parted into long cirrhous lines, with pearly edges, and a touch of scarlet and gold along their western side.

"What a drive we shall have this evening!" cried Bell. "It will be a clear night when we get to Henley, and there will be stars over the river, and perhaps a moon,—who knows?"

"I thought you would have provided a moon, Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant, gravely. "You have done very well for us this evening—oh! very well indeed. I have not seen any such beautiful picture for many years. You did very well to keep a dark day

all day, and make us tired of cold colours and green trees; and then you surprise us by this picture of magic—oh! it is very well done."

"All that it wants," said Bell, with a critical eye, "is a little woman in a scarlet shawl under the trees there, and over the green of the rushes—one of those nice fat little women who always wear bright shawls just to please landscape-painters—making a little blob of strong colour, you know, just like a ladybird among green moss. Do you know, I am quite grateful to a pleasant little countrywoman when she dresses herself ridiculously merely to make a landscape look fine; and how can you laugh at her when she comes near? I sometimes think that she wears those colours, especially those in her bonnet, out of mere modesty. She does not know what will please you—she puts in a little of everything to give you a choice. She holds up to you a whole bouquet of flowers, and says, 'Please, Miss, do you like blue? for here is corn-cockle;—or red? for here are poppies;—or yellow? for here are rock-roses.' She is like Perdita, you know, going about with an armful of blossoms, and giving to everyone what she thinks will please them."

"My dear," says Tita, "you are too generous. I am afraid that the woman wears those things out of vanity. She does not know what colour suits her complexion best, and so wears a variety, quite sure that one of them

must be the right one. And there are plenty of women in town, as well as in the country, who do that too."

"I hope you don't mean me," said Bell, contritely, as she leaned her arm over the side of the boat, and dipped the tips of her fingers into the glassy stream.

But if we were to get to Henley that night, there was no time for lingering longer about that bend by the river, with its islands and mills and woods. That great burst of colour in the west had been the expiring effort of the sun; and when we got back to the inn, there was nothing left in the sky but the last golden and crimson traces of his going down. The river was becoming grey, and the Cliefden woods were preparing for the night by drawing over themselves a thin veil of mist, which rendered them distant and shadowy, as they lay under the lambent sky.

The phaeton was at the door; our bill paid; an extra shawl got out of the imperial—although, in that operation, the Lieutenant nearly succeeded in smashing Bell's guitar.

"It will be dark before we get to Henley," says Tita.

"Yes," I answer obediently.

"And we are going now by cross-roads," she remarks.

"The road is a very good one," I venture to reply.

"But still it is a cross-road," she says.

"Very well, then, my dear," I say, wondering what the little woman is after.

"You must drive," she continues, "for none of us know the road."

"Yes, m'm, please m'm: any more orders?"

"Oh, Bell," says my Lady, with a gracious air (she can change the expression of her face in a second), "would you mind taking Count von Rosen under your charge until we get to Henley? I am afraid it will take both of us to find the road in the dark."

"No, I will take you under my charge, Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant, frankly; and therewith he helped Bell into the phaeton, and followed himself.

The consequence of this little arrangement was, that while Tita and I were in front, the young folks were behind: and no sooner had we started from the inn, got across the bridge, and were going down the road towards the village of Maidenhead proper, than Titania says, in a very low voice—

"Do you know, my dear, our pulling together in that boat quite brought back old times; and—and—and I wanted to be sitting up here beside you for a while, just to recall the old, old drives we used to have, you know, about here, and Henley, and Reading. How long ago is it, do you think?"

That wife of mine is a wonderful creature. You would have thought she was as innocent as a lamb when she uttered these words, looking up with a world of sincerity and pathos in the big, clear, earnest,

brown eyes. And the courage of the small creature, too, who thought she could deceive her husband by this open, transparent, audacious piece of hypocrisy!

"Madam," I said, with some care that the young folks should not overhear, "your tenderness overwhelms me."

"What do you mean?" she says, suddenly becoming as cold and as rigid as Lot's wife after the accident happened.

"Perhaps," I ventured to suggest, "you would like to have the hood up, and so leave them quite alone? Our presence must be very embarrassing."

"You are insulting Bell in saying such things," she says warmly; "or perhaps it is that you would rather have her for a companion than your own wife."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I would."

"She shall not sit by the Lieutenant again."

"I hope you don't mean to strangle her. We should arrive in Edinburgh in a sort of unicorn-fashion."

Tita relapsed into a dignified silence—that is always the way with her when she has been found out; but she was probably satisfied by hearing the Count and Bell chatting very briskly together, thus testifying to the success of her petty stratagem.

It was a pleasant drive, on that quiet evening, from Maidenhead across the lonely country that lies within the great curve of the Thames. Instead of turning

off at the corner of Stubbing's Heath, and so getting into the road that runs by Hurley Bottom, we held straight on towards Wargrave, so as to have the last part of the journey lead us up by the side of the river. So still it was! The road led through undulating stretches of common and past the edges of silent woods, while the sky was becoming pale and beautiful overhead, and the heights on the northern horizon—between Cookham and Hurley—were growing more and more visionary in the dusk. Sometimes, but rarely, we met a solitary wanderer coming along through the twilight, and a gruff "good-night" greeted us; but for the most part there seemed no life in this lonely part of the country, where rabbits ran across the road in front of us, and the last rooks that flew by in the dusk seemed hastening on to the neighbourhood of some distant village. It was a mild, fresh evening, with the air still damp and odorous after the rain; but overhead the sky still remained clear, and here and there, in the partings of the thin cloud, a pale star or planet had become faintly visible.

At last we got down into the village of Wargrave, and then it was nearly dark. There were a few people, mostly women, standing at the doors of the cottages; and here and there a ray of yellow light gleamed out from a small window. As we struck into the road that runs parallel with the Thames, there were men

coming home from their work; and their talk was heard at a great distance in the stillness of the night.

"How far are we from Henley?" said Bell.

"Are you anxious to get there?" replied Queen Titania, smiling quite benignly.

"No," said Bell, "this is so pleasant that I should like to go driving on until midnight, and we could see the moon coming through the trees."

"You have to consider the horses," said the Lieutenant, bluntly. "If you do tire them too much on the first days, they will not go so long a journey. But yet we are some way off, I suppose; and if Mademoiselle will sing something for us, I will get out the guitar."

"You'd better get down and light the lamps, rather," I remark to those indolent young people; whereupon the Count was instantly in the road, striking wax matches, and making use of curious expressions that seemed chiefly to consist of *g*'s and *r*'s.

So, with the lamps flaring down the dark road, we rolled along the highway that here skirts the side of a series of heights looking down into the Thames. Sometimes we could see a grey glimmer of the river beneath us through the trees; at other times the road took us down close to the side of the water, and Castor got an opportunity of making a playful little shy or two; but for the most part we drove through

dense woods, that completely shut off the starlight overhead.

More than once, indeed, we came to a steep descent that was buried in such total darkness that the Lieutenant jumped down and took the horses' heads, lest some unlucky step or stumble should throw us into the river. So far as we could make out, however, there was a sufficient wall on the side of the highway next the stream—a rough old wall, covered with plants and moss, that ran along the high and wooded bank.

Suddenly Bell uttered a cry of delight. We had come to a cleft in the glade which showed us the river running by some sixty feet beneath us, and on the surface of the water the young crescent of the moon was clearly mirrored. There was not enough moonlight to pierce the trees, or even to drown the pale light of the stars; but the sharp disc of silver, as it glimmered on the water, was sufficiently beautiful, and contained in itself the promise of many a lovely night.

"It has begun the journey with us," said Bell. "It is a young moon; it will go with us all the month; and we shall see it on the Severn, and on Windermere, and on the Solway, and on the Tweed. Didn't I promise you all a moon, sooner or later? And there it is!"

"It does not do us much good, Bell," said the driver, ruefully, the very horses seeming afraid to plunge into

the gulfs of darkness that were spectrally peered into by the light of the lamps.

"The moon is not for use," said Bell, "it is for magic; and once we have got to Henley, and put the horses up, and gone out again to the river, you shall all stand back and watch in a corner, and let Queen Titania go forward to summon the fairies. And as you listen in the dark, you will hear a little crackling and rustling along the opposite shore, and you will see small blue lights come out from the banks, and small boats, with a glowworm at their prow, come out into the stream. And then from the boats, and from all the fields near—where the mist of the river lies at night—you will see wonderful small men and women of radiant blue flame come forward, and there will be a strange sound like music in the trees, and the river itself will begin to say, in a kind of laugh, '*Titania, Titania! you have been so long away—years and years—looking after servants, and the schooling of boys, and the temper of a fractious husband——*'"

"Bell, you are impertinent."

"There are true words spoken in jest, sometimes," says Tita, with a dainty malice.

"Your bearing rein in England is a cruelty to the horse—you must take it away to-morrow," said the Lieutenant; and this continuation of a practical subject recalled these scapegraces from their jibes.

Here the road took us down by a gradual dip to the river again, and for the last mile before reaching our destination we had a pleasant and rapid run along the side of the stream. Then the lights of Henley were seen to glimmer before us; we crossed over the bridge, and swerving round to the right, drove into the archway of the Bell Inn.

"No, sir," remarked Dr. Johnson to Mr. Boswell, "there is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn." He then repeated, with great emotion, we are told, Shenstone's lines—

> "Whoe'er has travelled life's dull round,
> Where'er his stages may have been,
> May sigh to think he still has found
> The warmest welcome at an inn."

And Mr. Boswell goes on to say: "We happened to lie this night at the inn at Henley, where Shenstone wrote these lines." Now, surely, if ever belated travellers had reason to expect a cordial welcome, it was we four as we drove into the famous hostelry which had awakened enthusiasm in the poets and lexicographers of bygone days. But as Castor and Pollux stood under the archway, looking into the great dark yard before them, and as we gazed round in vain for the appearance of any waiter or other official, it occurred to Tita that the Bell Inn must have changed hands since Shen-

stone's time. Where was our comfortable welcome? A bewildered maid-servant came to stare at our phaeton with some alarm. Plaintive howls for the ostler produced a lad from the darkness of the stables, who told us that the ostler was away somewhere. Another maid-servant came out, and also looked alarmed. The present writer, fearing that Tony Lumpkin, transformed into an invisible spirit, had played him a trick, humbly begged this young woman to say whether he had driven by mistake into a private house. The young person looked afraid.

"My good girl," says Tita, with a gracious condescension, "will you tell us if this is the Bell Inn?"

"Yes, 'm; of course, 'm."

"And can we stay here to-night?"

"I'll bring the waiter, ma'am, directly."

Meanwhile the Lieutenant had got down, and was fuming about the yard to rout out the ostler's assistants, or some people who could put up the horses. He managed to unearth no fewer than three men, whom he brought in a gang. He was evidently determined not to form his grooming of the horses at Twickenham into a precedent.

At last there came a waiter, looking rather sleepy and a trifle helpless; whereupon my Lady and Bell departed into the inn, and left the luggage to be sent after them.

There appeared to be no one inside the house. The gases were lit in the spacious coffee-room; some rugs and bags were brought in and placed on the table; and then Tita and her companion, not daring to remove their bonnets, sat down in arm-chairs and stared at each other.

> "I fly from pomp, I fly from plate;
> I fly from falsehood's specious grin;
> But risk a ten times worser fate
> In choosing lodgings at an inn:"

—this was what Bell repeated, in a gentle voice, on the very spot that is sacred to the memory of Shenstone's satisfaction.

I requested the young man in the white tie to assign some reason for this state of affairs; and his answer was immediately forthcoming. There had been a regatta a few days before. The excitement in the small town, and more especially in the "Bell," had been dreadful. Now a reaction had set in; Henley and the "Bell" were alike deserted; and we were the victims of a collapse. I complimented the waiter on his philosophical acumen, and went out to see what had befallen Count von Rosen and the horses.

I found him standing in a stable that was dimly lighted by a solitary candle stuck against the wall, superintending the somewhat amateurish operations of the man who had undertaken to supply the ostler's

place. The Lieutenant had evidently not been hectoring his companions; on the contrary, he was on rather good terms with them, and was making inquiries about the familiar English names for chopped hay and other luxuries of the stable. He was examining the corn, too, and pronouncing opinion on the split beans which he had ordered. On the whole, he was satisfied with the place; although he expressed his surprise that the ostler of so big an inn should be absent.

When, at length, we had seen each of the horses supplied with an ample feed, fresh straw, and plenty of hay, the men were turned out and the stable-door locked. He allowed them on this occasion to keep the key. As we crossed the yard, a rotund, frank, cheery-looking man appeared, who was presumably the ostler. He made a remark or two; but the night-air was chill.

"Now," said Von Rosen, when we got into the big parlour, "we have to make ourselves pleasant and comfortable. I do think we must all drink whisky. For myself, I do not like the taste very much; but it looks very comfortable to see some people with steaming glasses before them. And I have brought out Mademoiselle's guitar, and she will sing us some songs, yes?"

"But you must also," says Beil, looking down.

"Oh, a hundred! a thousand! as many as you like!" he said; and then, with a sort of sigh, he took his cigar-

case out of his pocket and laid it pathetically on the mantelpiece. There was an air of renunciation in his face. Forthwith he rang the bell; and the waiter was asked to bring us certain liquors which, although not exclusively whisky, could be drunk in those steaming tumblers which the Lieutenant loved to see.

"O, come you from Newcastle?

—this was what Bell sang, with the blue ribbon of her guitar slung round her neck:

"O, come you from Newcastle?
Come you not there away?
And did you meet my true love,
Riding on a bonny bay?

And as she sang, with her eyes cast down, the Lieutenant seemed to be regarding her face with a peculiar interest. He forgot to lift the hot tumbler that was opposite him on the table—he had even forgotten Tita's gracious permission that he might have a cigar—he was listening and gazing merely, in a blank silence. And when she had finished, he eagerly begged her to sing another of the old English songs. And she sang—

"O mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O stay and hear, your true love's coming,
That can sing both high and low."

And when she had finished, he once more eagerly begged her to sing another of those old songs; and then, all of a sudden, catching sight of a smile on my Lady's face, he stopped, and apologized, and blushed rather, and said it was too bad—that he had forgotten, and would himself try something on the guitar.

When, at length, the women had gone upstairs, he fetched down his cigar from the mantelpiece, lit it, stretched out his long legs, and said—

"How very English she is!"

"She! who?"

"Why, your Miss Bell. I do like to hear her talk of England as if she had a pride in it, and mention the names of towns as if she loved them because they were English, and speak of the fairies and stories as if she was familiar with them because they belong to her own country. You can see how she is fond of everything that is like old times,—an old house, an old milestone, an old bridge — everything that is peculiar and old and English. And then she sings, oh! so very well—so very well indeed; and these old songs, about English places and English customs of village-life, they seem to suit her very well, and you think she herself is the heroine of them. But as for that young man in Twickenham, he is a very pitiful fellow."

"How have you suddenly come to that conclusion?"

I inquire of our Lieutenant, who is lazily letting the cigar-smoke curl about his moustache and beard as he lies back and fixes his light blue eyes contemplatively on the ceiling.

"How do I know? I do not know: I think so. He ought to be very well satisfied of knowing a young lady like that—and very proud of going to marry her—instead of annoying her with bad tempers."

"That is true. A young man under such circumstances cannot be too grateful or too amiable. They are not always so, however. You yourself, for example, when you parted from Fräulein Fallersleben——"

Here the Lieutenant jumped up in his chair, and said with unnecessary vehemence—

"Donnerwetter! look at the provocation I had! It was not my ill-temper; I am not more ill-tempered than other men: but when you know you mean very well, and that you treat a woman as perhaps not all men would be inclined to do in the same case, and she is a hypocrite, and she pretends much, and at the same time she is writing to you, she is—pfui! I cannot speak of it!"

"You were very fond of her."

"Worse luck."

"And you had a great fight, and used hard words to each other, and parted so that you would rather meet Beelzebub than her."

"Why, yes, it is so: I would rather meet twenty Beelzebubs than her."

"That is the way of you boys. You don't know that in after years, when all these things have got smooth and misty and distant, you will come to like her again; and what will you think then of your hard words and your quarrels? If you children could only understand how very short youth is, how very long middle age is, and how very dull old age is,—if you could only understand how the chief occupation of the longer half of your life is looking back on the first short half of it,—you would know the value of storing up only pleasant recollections of all your old friends. If you find that your sweetheart is a woman compelled by her nature to fall in love with the man nearest her, and forget him who is out of the way, why devote her to the infernal gods? In after years, you will be grateful to her for the pleasant days and weeks you spent with her, when you were both happy together, and you will look back on the old times very tenderly; and then, on those occasions when you German folks drink to the health of your absent dear ones, won't you be glad that you can include her who was dear enough to you in your youth?"

"That is very good; it is quite true," said the Lieutenant, in almost an injured tone—as if Fräulein Fallersleben were responsible.

"Look for a moment," I say to my pensive pupil, "at the pull a man has who has spent his youth in pleasant scenery. When he gets old, and can do nothing but live the old life over again by looking back, he has only to shut his eyes, and his brain is full of fresh and bright pictures of the old times in the country; and the commonest landscape of his youth he will remember then as if it were steeped in sunlight."

"That is quite true," said Von Rosen, thoughtfully; but the next moment he uttered an angry exclamation, started up from his chair, and began walking up and down the room.

"It is all very well," he said, with an impatient vehemence, "to be amiable and forgiving when you are old—because you don't care about it, that is the reason. When you are young, you expect fair play. Do you think if I should be seventy I will care one brass farthing whether Pauline—that is, Fräulein Fallersleben—was honest or no? I will laugh at the whole affair then. But now, when you are ashamed of the deceit of a woman, is it not right you tell her? Is it not right she knows what honest men and women think of her, yes? What will she think of you if you say to her, '*Farewell, Fräulein. You have behaved not very well; but I am amiable; I will forgive you.*'"

"There, again: you parted with her in wrath, because

you did not like to appear weak and complaisant in her eyes."

"At all events, I said what I felt," said the Lieutenant, warmly. "I do think it is only hypocrisy and selfishness to say, '*I hate this woman, but I will be kind to her, because when I grow old I will look back and consider myself to have been very good.*'"

"You have been deeply hit, my poor lad; you are quite fevered about it now. You cannot even see how a man's own self-respect will make him courteous to a woman whom he despises; and is he likely to be sorry for that courtesy, when he looks at it in cold blood, and recognizes the stupendous fact that the man who complains of the inconstancy of a woman utters a reflection against Providence?"

"But you don't know—you don't know," said the Count, pitching his cigar into the grate, "what a woman this one showed herself to be. After all, it does not matter. But when I look at such a woman as your Miss Bell here——"

"Yes: when you look at her?"

"Why, I see the difference," said the Lieutenant, gloomily; and therewith he pulled out another cigar.

I stopped this, however, and rang for candles. As he lit his in rather a melancholy fashion, he said—

"It is a very good thing to see a woman like that—young-hearted, frank, honest in her eyes, and full of

pleasantness, too, and good spirits—oh! it is very fine indeed, merely to look at her; for you do believe that she is a very good girl, and you think there are good women in the world. But as for that young man at Twickenham——"

"Well, what of him?"

The Lieutenant looked up from the candle; but saw nothing to awaken his suspicions.

"Oh," he said carelessly, as we left the room, "I do think him a most pitiful fellow."

CHAPTER VI.

A GIFT OF TONGUES.

"My lady is an archer rare,
And in the greenwood joyeth she ;
There never was a marksman yet who could compare
In skill with my ladie."

EARLY morning in Henley ! From over the wooded hills in the east there comes a great flood of sunshine that lies warmly on the ruddy side of the old inn, on its evergreens, and on the slopes of sweet-scented mignonette, and sweetbriar, and various blossoms that adorn the bank of the river. The river itself, lying apparently motionless between level and green meadows, has its blue surface marred here and there by a white ripple of wind ; the poplars that stand on its banks are rustling in the breeze ; there are swallows dipping and skimming about the old bridge, and ducks paddling along among the rushes and weeds, and cattle browsing in the deep

green; and further on, some high-lying stretches of rye-grass struck into long and silvery waves by the morning wind.

All the stir and motion of the new day have come upon us; and Henley, clean, white, and red, with its town-hall shining brightly down its chief street, and all its high clusters of old-fashioned houses backed by a fringe of dark-wooded hill, shows as much life and briskness as are usually seen in a quaint, small, old-fashioned English town. But where the silence and the stillness of the morning dwell is away up the reach of the river. Standing on the bridge, you see the dark blue stream, reflecting a thousand bright colours underneath the town, gradually become greyer in hue until it gets out amid the meadows and woods; and then, with a bold white curve, that is glimmering like silver in the north, it sweeps under that line of low, soft green hills which have grown pearly and grey in the tender morning mist. Bell is standing on the bridge, too. The Lieutenant has brought out her sketch-book, and she has placed it on the stone parapet before her. Bu somehow she seems disinclined to begin work thus early on our journey; and, instead, her eyes are looking blankly and wistfully at the rich green meadows and the red cows, and the long white reach of the river shining palely beneath the faint green heights in the north.

"Is Henley the prettiest town in the world, I wonder?" she said.

"Yes, if you think so, Mademoiselle," replied Von Rosen, gently.

She lifted her eyes towards him, as though she had been unaware of his presence. Then she turned to the stream.

"I suppose, if one were to live always among those bright colours, one would get not to see them, and would forget how fine is this old bridge, with the pretty town, and the meadows, and the stream. Seeing it only once, I shall never forget Henley, or the brightness of this morning."

With that, she closed her sketch-book, and looked round for Tita. That small person was engaged in making herself extremely wretched about her boys and the pony; and was becoming vastly indignant because she could get no one to sympathise with her wild imaginings of diverse perils and dangers.

"Why, to hear you talk," she was saying at this moment, "one would think you had never experienced the feelings of a parent—that you did not know you were the father of those two poor boys."

"That," I remark to her, "is not a matter on which I am bound to express an opinion."

"Very pretty—very!" she said with a contemptuous smile. "But I will say this—that if *you* had had to

buy the pony, the boys would have had to wait long enough before they were exposed to the dangers you think so little about now."

"Madam," I observe, sternly, "you are the victim of what theologians call invincible ignorance. I might have bought that pony and all its belongings for a 20*l.* note; whereas I shall have to pay 40*l.* a year for its keep."

"Oh, I know," says my Lady, with great sweetness, "how men exaggerate those things. It is convenient. They complain of the cost of the horses, of the heaviness of the taxes, and other things; when the real fact is that they are trying to hide what they spend out of their income on cigars, and in their clubs when they go to town. I counted up our taxes the other day, and I don't believe that they have been over 8*l.* for the whole of the last six months. Now you *know* you said they were nearly 35*l.* a year."

"And you counted in those that are due next week, I suppose?"

"Did you leave money to pay for them?" she asks, mildly.

"And you based your calculations on some solitary instalment for armorial bearings?—which you brought into the family, you know."

"Yes," she replies, with an engaging smile. "That was one thing you did not require before—I am sorry

to have caused you so much expense. But you need not avoid the subject. Mrs. Quinet told me last week that she knows her husband pays every year 65*l.* for club-subcriptions alone, and nearly 40*l.* for cigars."

"Then Mrs. Quinet must have looked into your eyes, my dear, and seen what a simple little thing you are; for your knowledge of housekeeping and other expenses, I will say, is as slight as need be, and Mrs. Quinet has been simply making a fool of you. For the Major belongs to two clubs, and in the one he pays eight guineas and in the other ten guineas a year. And he smokes Manillas at 25*s.* a hundred, which is equivalent, my dear—though you will scarcely credit it—to threepence apiece."

"The money must go somehow," says Tita, defiantly.

"That is a customary saying among women; but it generally refers to their own little arrangements."

"You avoid the question very skilfully."

"I should have thought you would have preferred that."

"Why?" she says, looking up.

"Because you accused me of stinginess in not buying a pony for the boys, and I showed you that I should have to pay 40*l.* a year for the brute."

"Yes, *showed* me! I suppose by that pleasing fiction you will gain another 20*l.* a year to spend in Partagas,

and Murias, and trumpery stuff that the tobacconists tell you came from abroad."

"My dear," I say, "your insolence is astounding."

"If you call speaking the plain truth insolence, I cannot help it. Bell, breakfast must be ready."

"Yes, my Lady," says Bell, coming forward demurely. "But I wasn't doing anything."

So they went off; and the Count and I followed.

"What is the matter?" says he.

"Do you know what a 'relish' is at breakfast?"

"No."

"Then don't marry, or you will find out."

The tall young man with the brown beard and the light eyes, shrugged his shoulders, and only said, as we walked to the inn—

"That is a very pleasant comedy, when it means nothing. If it was earnest, you would not find so much enjoyment in it—no, not at all—you would not amuse yourselves, like two children, instead of the parents of a family. But, my dear friend, it is a dangerous thing; for some day you will meet with a stupid person, who will not understand how Madame and yourself do make-believe in that way, and that person will be astonished, and will talk of it, and you will both have a very bad reputation among your friends."

However, there was one amiable person at the breakfast-table, and that was our pretty Bell.

"Bell," I said, "I am going to sit by you. You never provoke useless quarrels about nothing; you are never impertinent; you never argue; and you can look after a breakfast-table better than people twice your age."

Bell prudently pretended not to hear; indeed, she was very busy helping everybody and making herself very useful and pleasant all round. She seemed to have forgotten her independent ways; and was so good-naturedly anxious to see that the Lieutenant's coffee was all right, that he was apparently quite touched by her friendliness. And then she was very cheerful, too; and was bent on waking up the spirits of the whole party—but in a bright, submissive, simple fashion that the audacious young lady did not always affect.

"Did you hear the cocks crowing this morning?" she said, turning to Von Rosen with her frank eyes. "I thought it was so pleasant to be woke up that way instead of listening to the milkman coming along a dismal London square, and calling up the maidservants with his '*El-cho!*' '*El-cho!*' But did you notice that one of the cocks cried quite plainly, '*Oh, go away!*' *Oh, go awa-a-ay!*'—which was a stupid animal to have near an inn; and another fine fellow, who always started with a famous flourish, had got a cold, and at the highest note he went off at a tangent into something like a plaintive squeak. The intention of that crow, so far

as it went, was far better than the feeble '*Oh, go away!*' of the other; and I was quite sorry for the poor animal. —Do have some more toast, Count.—He reminded me of poor Major Quinet, Tita, who begins a sentence very well; but all at once it jerks up into the air—goes off like a squib, you know, just below his nose; and he looks amazed and ashamed, like a boy that has let a bird escape out of a bag."

"You need not amuse yourself with the personal defects of your neighbours, Bell," says Tita, who did not expect to have Major Quinet brought forward again. "Major Quinet is a very well-informed and gentlemanly man, and looks after his family and his estate with the greatest care."

"I must say, Tita," retorted Bell (and I trembled for the girl), "that you have an odd trick of furnishing people with a sort of certificate of character, whenever you hear their names mentioned. Very likely the Major can manage his affairs in spite of his cracked voice; but you know you told me yourself, Tita, that he had been unfortunate in money matters, and was rather perplexed just now. Of course, I wouldn't say such a thing of one of your friends; but I have heard of bankrupts; and I have heard of a poor little man being so burdened with debt, that he looked like a mouse drawing a brougham, and then, of course, he had to go into the Court to ask them to unharness him.—Do have

some more coffee, Count; I am sure that is quite cold."

"You ought to be a little careful, Bell," says my Lady. "You know absolutely nothing of Major Quinet, and yet you hint that he is insolvent."

"I didn't—did I?" says Bell, turning to her companion.

"No," replies the Count, boldly.

At this Tita looked astonished for a second; but presently she deigned to smile, and say something about the wickedness of young people. Indeed, my Lady seemed rather pleased by Bell's audacity in appealing to the Lieutenant; and she was in a better humour when, some time after, we went out to the river and got a boat.

Once more upon the Thames, we pulled up the river, that lies here between wooded hills on the one side, and level meadows on the other. The broad blue stream was almost deserted; and as we got near the green islands, we could see an occasional young moorhen paddle out from among the rushes, and then go quickly in again, with its white tail bobbing in unison with its small head and beak. We rowed into the sluice of the mill that lies under Park Place, and there, having floated down a bit under some willows, we fixed the boat to a stump of a tree, landed, and managed to get into the road along which we had driven the previous night. As we ascended this pleasant path, which is cut through

the woods of various mansions, and looks down upon the green level of Wargrave Marsh, and the shining meadows beyond the other bank of the river, the ascents and descents of the road seemed less precipitous than they had appeared the night before. What we had taken, further, for wild masses of rock, and fearful chasms, and dangerous bridges, were found to be part of the ornamentation of a park—the bridge spanning a hollow having been built of sham rock-work, which, in the daylight, clearly revealed its origin. Nevertheless, this road leading through the river-side woods is a sufficiently picturesque and pleasant one; and in sauntering along for a mile or two and back we consumed a goodly portion of the morning. Then there was a brisk pull back to Henley; and the phaeton was summoned to appear.

When the horses were put in, and the phaeton brought out, I found that Von Rosen had quietly abstracted the bearing-reins from the harness, some time during the morning. However, no one could grudge the animals this relief, for the journey they had to make to-day, though not over twenty-three miles, was considerably hilly.

Now Tita had come early out, and had evidently planned a nice little arrangement. She got in behind. Then she bade Bell get up in front. The Lieutenant had lingered for a moment in search of a cigar-case; and my Lady had clearly determined to ask him to

drive so soon as he came out. But, as she had not expressed any contrition for her conduct of that morning, some punishment was required; and so, just as Von Rosen came out, I took the reins, stepped up beside Bell, and he, of course, was left to join the furious little lady behind.

"I thought the Count was going to drive," says Tita, with a certain cold air. "Surely the road to Oxford is easy to find."

"It is," I say to her. "For you know all roads lead to Rome, and they say that Oxford is half-way to Rome —*argal*——"

But knowing what effect this reference to her theological sympathies was likely to have on Tita, I thought it prudent to send the horses on; and as they sprang forward and rattled up the main street of Henley, her retort, if any, was lost in the noise. There was a laugh in Bell's eyes; but she seemed rather frightened all the same, and said nothing for some time.

The drive from Henley to Oxford is one of the finest in England, the road leading gradually up through pleasant pastures and great woods until it brings you on to a common—the highest ground south of the Trent —from which you see an immeasurable wooded plain stretching away into the western horizon. First of all, as we left Henley on that bright morning, the sweet air blowing coolly among the trees, and bringing us odours

from wild flowers and breadths of new-mown hay, we leisurely rolled along what is appropriately called the Fair Mile, a broad smooth highway running between Lambridge Wood and No Man's Hill, and having a space of grassy common on each side of it. This brought us up to Assenton Cross, and here, the ascent getting much more stiff, Bell took the reins, and the Count and I walked up the hill until we reached Bix Turnpike.

"What a curious name!" said Bell, as she pulled the horses up.

"Most likely," said the Lieutenant, who was looking at an ancient edition of Cary's Itinerary, "it is from the old Saxon *bece*, the beech-tree, which is plentiful here. But in this book I find it is Bixgibwen, which is not in the modern books. Now what is *gibwen?*"

"St. Caedwyn, of course," said Bell, merrily.

"You laugh, but perhaps it is true," replied the Lieutenant, with the gravity befitting a student: "why not St. Caedwyn's beeches? You do call many places about here by the trees. There is Assenton; that is the place of ash-trees. We shall soon be at Nettlebed; and then comes Nuffield, which is Nut-field,—how do you call your wildnut-tree in England?"

"The hazel," said Bell. "But that is commonplace; I like the discovery about St. Caedwyn's beeches better: and here, sure enough, they are."

The road at this point—something less than a mile past Bix turnpike—plunges into a spacious forest of beeches, which stretches along the summit of the hill almost on to Nettlebed. And this road is bordered by a strip of common, which again leads into a tangled maze of bracken and briar; and then you have the innumerable stems of the beeches, showing long vistas into the green heart of the wood. The sunlight was shimmering down on this wilderness, lying warmly on the road and its green margin, and piercing here and there with golden arrows the dense canopy of leaves beyond. High as we were the light breeze was shut off by the beeches, and in the long broad cleft in which the road lay the air was filled with resinous odours, that of the tall green and yellow brackens prevailing. An occasional jay fled screaming down between the smooth grey branches, giving us a glimpse of white and blue as it vanished; but otherwise there seemed to be no birds about, and the wild underwood and long alleys lay still and warm in the green twilight of the leaves.

"It is very like the Black Forest, I think," said the Lieutenant.

"Oh, it is much lighter in colour," cried Bell. "Look at all those silver greys of the stems and the lichens, and clear green overhead, and the light browns and reds beneath, where the sunlight shines down through a veil. It is lighter, prettier, more cheerful than your miles of

solemn pines, with the great roads cut through them for the carts, and the gloom and stillness underneath, where there is no growth of underwood, but only level beds of green moss, dotted with dropped cones."

"You have a very accurate eye for colours, Mademoiselle; no wonder you paint so well," was all that the Lieutenant said. But Tita warmly remonstrated with Bell.

"You know, Bell," she said, "that all the Black Forest is not like that; there is every variety of forest-scenery there. And pray, Miss Criticism, where were the gloomy pines and the solemn avenues in a certain picture which was sold at the Dudley last year for twenty-five solid English sovereigns?"

"You needn't tell Count von Rosen what my income is," said Bell. "I took two months to paint that picture."

"That is a very good income," said the Lieutenant, with a smile.

"I do not like people with large incomes," said Bell, dexterously avoiding that part of the subject. "I think they must have qualms sometimes, or else be callous. Now I would have everybody provided with a certain income, say 200*l.* a year; but I would not like to prevent all competition, and so I would fix an income at which all people must stop. They might strive and strive if they liked, just like bells of air in a champagne glass, you know, but they should only be able to reach

a certain level in the end. I would have nobody with more than 1,000*l.* a year; that would be my maximum."

"A thousand a year!" exclaimed Tita. "Isn't a thousand ten hundred?"

"Yes," said Bell, after a second's calculation.

"And suppose you have one hundred to pay for two boys at school, and another hundred for rent, and another hundred for the keep of two horses, and a hundred and twenty for servants' wages——"

"Perhaps, Tita," I suggest in the meekest possible way, "you might as well tell Count von Rosen what you pay for a leg of mutton, so that when he next comes to dine with us he may enjoy himself the more."

It is well that the lightning which is said to dart from women's eyes is a harmless sort of thing—a flash in the pan, as it were, which is very pretty, but sends no deadly lead out. However, as Queen Tita had really behaved herself very well since we set out from Henley, I begged Bell to stop and let us in, and then I asked the Lieutenant if he would drive.

By this time we had walked the horses nearly to the end of the pleasant stretch of beechwood, which is about a mile and a half long, and before us was a bit of breezy common and the village of Nettlebed. Von Rosen took the reins and sent the horses forward.

"Why did you not continue to drive?" said Tita, rather timidly, when I had taken my seat beside her.

"Because we shall presently have to go down steep hills; and as the Count took off the bearing-reins this morning, we may as well hold him responsible for not letting the horses down."

"I thought perhaps you wanted to sit beside me," she said, in a low voice.

"Well, now you mention it, my dear, that was the reason."

"It would have been a sufficient reason a good many years ago," she said, with a fine affectation of tenderness; "but that is all over now. You have been very rude to me."

"Then don't say anything more about it: receive my forgiveness, Tita."

"That was not the way you used to speak to me when we were at Eastbourne," she said; and with that she looked very much as if she were going to cry. Of course she was not going to cry. She has had the trick of looking like that from her youth upward; but as it is really about as pretty and pathetic as the real thing, it invariably answers the same purpose. It is understood to be a signal of surrender, a sort of appeal for compassion; and so the rest of this conversation, being of a quite private nature, need not be made public.

The Count was taking us at a brisk pace across the bit of common, and then we rattled into the little clump of red-brick houses which forms the picturesque village of

Nettlebed. Now if he had been struck with some recollection of the Black Forest on seeing Nettlebed Wood, imagine his surprise on finding the little inn in the village surmounted by a picture of a white deer with a royal crown on its head, a fair resemblance to the legendary creature that appeared to St. Hubertus, and that figures in so many of the Schwarzwald stories and pictures. However, we were out of Nettlebed before he could properly express his astonishment, and in the vast picture that was now opening out before us there was little that was German.

We stopped on the summit of Nuffield Heath, and found below, as far as the eye could reach, the great and fertile plain of Berkshire, with a long and irregular line of hill shutting it in on the south. In this plain of Fields as they are called—Wallingford Field, Didcot Field, Long Whittenham Field, and so on—small villages peeped out from among the green woods and pastures, where a faint blue smoke rose up into the sunshine. Here, as Bell began to expound,—for she had been reading "The Scouring of the White Horse" and various other books to which that romantic monograph had directed her,—some great deeds had happened in the olden time. Along that smooth line of hill in the south—now lying blue in the haze of the light—the Romans had cut a road which is still called the Ridgeway or Icleton Street; and in the villages of the

plain, from Pangbourne in the south-east to Shellingford in the north-west, traces of the Roman occupation were frequently found. And then, underneath that blue ridge of hill and down lay Wantage, in which King Alfred was born; and further on the ridge itself becomes Dragon's Hill, where St. George slew the beast that ravaged this fair land, and there, as all men know, is the figure of the White Horse cut on the slope to commemorate the great battle of Ashdown.

"And Ashdown, is that there also?" asked the Lieutenant.

"Well, no," said Bell, trying to remember what she had been told; "I think there is some doubt about it. King Alfred, you know, fell back from Reading, when he was beaten, but he stopped somewhere on the hills near——"

"Why not the hill we have just come up?" said the Lieutenant, with a laugh. "It is near Reading, is it not? and there you have Assenton, which is Ashenton, which is Ashendown, which is Ashdown."

"Precisely," says Tita, with a gracious smile. "All you have to do is to change John into Julius, and Smith into Cæsar, and there you are."

"But that is not fair, Tita," said Bell, turning round, and pleading quite seriously. "Assenton *is* the same as Ashendon, and that is the name of the place where the battle was fought. I think Count von Rosen is quite right."

"Well, if you think so, Bell, that settles it," said my Lady, looking rather pleased than otherwise.

And so we began to descend into this plain of many memories by a steep road that is appropriately called Gangsdown Hill. From thence a succession of undulations carried us into the green breadths of Crowmarsh Field; until, finally, we drove into the village of Bensington, and pulled up at the "Crown" there, where we proposed to have some luncheon.

"This is a village of the dead," said Tita, looking down the main thoroughfare, where not a living soul was to be seen.

But at all events a human being appeared in the yard—not a withered and silent ostler, but a stout, hale, cheerful person, whose white shirt-sleeves and gold chain proclaimed him landlord. With the aid of a small boy, he undertook to put the horses up for an hour or two; and then we went into the inn. Here we found that, as the man in the yard was at once landlord and ostler, his wife inside was landlady, cook, and waitress; and in a short space of time she had brought us some excellent chops. Not much time was spent over the meal, for the parlour in which we sat—albeit it was a sort of museum of wonderful curiosities, and was, moreover, enlivened by the presence of a crack-voiced cockatoo—was rather small and dark. Accordingly, while the horses were having

their rest, we sauntered out to have a look at Bensington.

It is probably not the dullest little village in England, but it would be hard to find a duller. There was an old shepherd with a crook in his hand and a well-worn smockfrock on his back, who was leaning over the wooden palings in front of a house, and playfully talking to a small boy who stood at an open door. With many old country people it is considered the height of raillery to alarm a boy with stories of the punishment he is about to receive for something, and to visit him with an intimation that all his sins have been found out. This old shepherd, with his withered pippin face, and his humorous grin, and his lazy arms folded on the top of the palings, was evidently enjoying himself vastly.

"A wur a-watchin' o' thee, a wur, and thy vather, he knaws, too, and he'll gie thee thy vairin wi' a good tharn stick when he comes hwom. A zah thee this marnin', my lad—thou'lt think nah one wur thear, eh?"

We left this good-natured old gentleman frightening the boy, and went round to the outskirts of the village. Here, at least, we found one explanation of the inordinate silence of Bensington—the children were all at their lessons. The door of the plain little building, which had BRITISH SCHOOL inscribed over the entrance, was open, and from within there issued a low, confused

murmur. The Prussian, anxious to see something of the interior of an English school, walked up to the place; but he had just managed to cast a glance round on the rows of children when the door was politely shut in his face, and he returned, saying—

"I am not an inspector; why need they fear?"

But when, after wandering about the suburban gardens and by-ways for a space, we returned to Bensington, we found that important village in a state of profound excitement. In the main thoroughfare a concourse of five people had assembled—three women and two children—and from the doors of the houses on both sides of the street innumerable faces, certainly not less than a dozen, were gazing forth. It is true that the people did not themselves come out—they seemed rather to shrink from courting publicity; but they were keenly alive to what was going on, and Bensington had become excited.

For there had appeared in the main street a little, dry, odd old man, who was leading a small donkey-cart, and who was evidently rather the worse for liquor. He was a seller of peas. He had summoned the inhabitants to come out and buy the peas, and he was offering them at what we were told were very reasonable terms. But just as the old man was beginning to enjoy the receipt of customs, there drove into the place a sharp, brisk, middle-aged man, with a shiny face, a fine

presence, and a ringing voice. This man had a neat cart, a handsome pony, and his name was printed in large letters, so that all could read. He was also a seller of peas. Now, although this rude and ostentatious owner of the pony was selling his produce at fourpence, while the humble proprietor of the donkey sold his at threepence, the women recalled their children and bade them go to the dearer market. There was something in the appearance of the man, in the neatness of his cart, and in the ringing cheerfulness of his voice, which told you he sold good peas. This was the cause of the great perturbation in Bensington; for no sooner did the half-tipsy old man see that his rival was carrying the day before him than he leaned his arms over his donkey's head, and began to make ironical comments on his enemy and on the people of Bensington. He was apparently in the best of spirits. You would have thought it delighted him to see the small girls come timidly forward to him, and then be warned away by a cry from their mothers that they were to go to the other cart. Nay, he went the length of advertising his neighbour's wares. He addressed the assembled multitudes—by this time there were nearly fifteen people visible in Bensington—and told them he wouldn't sell his peas if he was to get a fortune for them.

"Pay your foppence," he said to them, in accents

which showed he was not of Bensington born, "there are yer right good peas. It's all along o' my donkey as you'll not take mine, though they're only thrippence. I wouldn't sell. I won't sell this day. Take back yer money. I won't sell my peas at a crown apiece—darned if I do!"

And with that he left his donkey and went over to the proprietor of the pony. He was not in a fighting mood—not he. He challenged his rival to run the pony against the donkey, and offered to bet the donkey would be in London a week before the other. The man in the cart took no notice of these sallies. In a brisk, practical, methodical fashion, he was measuring out his peas, and handing them down to the uplifted bowls that surrounded him. Sometimes he grinned in a good-natured way at the facetious remarks of his unfortunate antagonist; but all the same he stuck to his business and drove a thriving trade. How there came to be on that afternoon so many people in Bensington who wished to buy peas must remain a mystery.

"And now," said Bell, as we once more got into the phaeton, "we shall be in Oxford in two hours. Do you think the post-office will be open?"

"Very likely," said Tita, with some surprise; "but do you expect letters already, Bell?"

"You cannot tell," said the young lady, with just a shade of embarrassment, "how soon Kate may send

letters after us. And she knows we are to stop a day at Oxford. It will not be too dark to go hunting for the post-office, will it?"

"But you shall not go," said the Lieutenant, giving a shake to the reins, as if in obedience to Bell's wish. "When you have got to the hotel, I will go and get your letters for you."

"Oh no, thank you," said Bell, in rather a hurried and anxious way. "I should prefer much to go for them myself, thank you."

That was all that was said on the subject; and Bell, we noticed, was rather silent for the first few miles of our afternoon drive. The Lieutenant did his best to amuse her, and carried on a lively conversation chiefly by himself. That mention of letters seemed to have left Bell rather serious; and she was obviously not over-delighted at the prospect of reaching Oxford.

The road from Bensington thither is pleasant enough, but not particularly interesting. For the most part it descends by a series of undulations into the level plain watered by the Isis, the Cherwell, and the Thames. But the mere notion of approaching that famous city, which is consecrated with memories of England's greatest men —statesmen and divines, melancholy philosophers and ill-starred poets—is in itself impressive, and lends to the rather common-place landscape an air of romance. While as yet the old town lies unseen amid the woods

that crowd up to the very edge of the sky, one fancies the bells of the colleges are to be heard, as Pope heard them when he rode, a solitary horseman, over these very hills, and down into the plain, and up to Magdalen Bridge.[1] We cared little to look at the villages, strung like beads on the winding thread of the road—Shellingford, Dorchester, Nuneham Courtenay, and Sandford—nor did we even turn aside to go down to Iffley and the Thames. It was seven when we drew near Oxford. There were people sauntering out from the town to have their evening walk. When, at last, we stopped to pay toll in front of the old lichen-covered bridge across the Cherwell, the tower of Magdalen College, and the magnificent elms on the other side of the way, had caught a tinge of red from the dusky sunset, and

[1] "Nothing could have more of that melancholy which once used to please me, than my last day's journey; for after having passed through my favourite woods in the forest, with a thousand reveries of past pleasures, I rid over hanging hills, whose tops were edged with groves, and whose feet watered with winding rivers, listening to the falls of cataracts below, and the murmuring of the winds above; the gloomy verdure of Stonor succeeded to these, and then the shades of evening overtook me. The moon rose in the clearest sky I ever saw, by whose solemn light I paced on slowly, without company, or any interruption to the range of my thoughts. About a mile before I reached Oxford, all the bells tolled in different notes; the clocks of every college answered one another and sounded forth (some in deeper, some in a softer tone) that it was eleven at night. All this was no ill preparation to the life I have led since among those old walls, venerable galleries, stone porticoes, studious walks, and solitary scenes of the University."—*Pope to Mrs. Martha Blount.* [Stonor Park lies about two miles to the right of Bix turnpike.]

there was a faint reflection of crimson down on the still waters that lay among the rank green meadows. Then we drove on into the High Street, and here, in the gathering dusk, the yellow lamps were beginning to glimmer. Should we pull up at the Angel—that famous hostelry of ancient times, whose name used to be inscribed on so many notable coaches? "We put up at the Angel Inn," writes Mr. Boswell, "and passed the evening by ourselves in easy and familiar conversation." Alas! the Angel has now been pulled down. Or shall we follow the hero of the Splendid Shilling, who,

> "When nightly mists arise,
> To Juniper's Magpie or Town Hall repairs?"

They, too, are gone. But as Castor and Pollux, during these moments of doubt and useless reminiscence, are still taking us over the rough stones of the "High," some decision must be come to; and so, at a sudden instigation, Count von Rosen pulls up in front of the Mitre, which is an appropriate sign for the High Street of Oxford, and betokens age and respectability.

The stables of the Mitre are clean, well-ventilated, and well-managed—indeed, no better stables could have been found for putting up the horses for their next day's rest. When we had seen to their comfort, we returned to the inn, and found that my Lady and Bell had not only had all the luggage conveyed to our respective

rooms, but had ordered dinner, changed their attire, and were waiting for us in the square, old-fashioned, low-roofed coffee-room which looks out into the High Street. A tall waiter was laying the cloth for us; the lights were lit all round the wall; our only companions were two elderly gentlemen who sat in a remote corner, and gave themselves up to politics; and Bell, having resolved to postpone her inquiry about letters until next morning—in obedience to the very urgent entreaties of the Lieutenant—seemed all the more cheerful for that resolution.

But if our two friends by the fire-place could not overhear our talk, we could overhear theirs; and all the time we sat at dinner, we were receiving a vast amount of enlightenment about the condition of the country. The chief spokesman was a short, stout person, with a fresh, healthy, energetic face, keen grey eyes, bushy grey whiskers, a bald head, and a black satin waistcoat; his companion a taller and thinner man, with straight black hair, sallow cheeks, and melancholy dark eyes: and the former, in a somewhat pompous manner, was demonstrating the blindness of ordinary politicians to the wrath that was to come. Lord Palmerston saw it, he said. There was no statesman ever like Lord Palmerston—there would never be his like again. For was not the North bound to fight the South in every country? And what should we do if the men of the

great manufacturing towns were to come down on us? There were two Englands in this island—and the Westminster Houses knew nothing of the rival camps that were being formed. And did not the North always beat the South? Did not Rome beat Carthage? and the Huns the Romans? and the Northern States the Southern States? and Prussia Austria? and Germany France? And when the big-limbed and determined men of Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, Preston, Newcastle, and such towns, rose to sweep aside the last feudal institutions of this country, of what avail would be a protest on the part of the feeble and self-indulgent South?

"This kingdom, Sir," said the gentleman with the satin waistcoat and gold seals, in such lofty tones that Count von Rosen scarcely minded his dinner,—"this kingdom, Sir, is more divided at this moment than it was during the Wars of the Roses. It is split into hostile factions; and which is the more patriotic? Neither. There is no patriotism left—only the selfishness of class. We care no more for the country as a country. We are cosmopolitan. The scepticism of the first French Revolution has poisoned our big towns. We tolerate a monarchy as a harmless toy. We tolerate an endowed priesthood, because we think they cannot make our peasantry more ignorant than they are. We allow pauperism to increase and eat into the heart of

the State, because we think it no business of ours to interfere. We see our lowest classes growing up to starve or steal, in ignorance and dirt; our middle classes scrambling for wealth to get out of the state they were born in; our upper classes given over to luxury and debauchery—patriotism gone—continental nations laughing at us—our army a mere handful of men with incompetent officers—our navy made the subject of destructive experiments by interested cliques—our Government ready to seize on the most revolutionary schemes to get together a majority and remain in power—selfishness, incompetence, indifference become paramount—it is horrible, Sir, it is Orrible."

In his anxiety to be emphatic, he left out that one "h;" it was his only slip. Our Lieutenant turned to Tita, and said:

"I have met many English people in Germany who have spoken to me like that. They do seem to have a pride in criticising themselves and their country. Is it because they feel they are so strong, and so rich, and so good, that they can afford to dispraise themselves? Is it because they feel themselves so very safe in this island that they think little of patriotism, yes? But I have observed this thing—that when it is a foreigner who begins to say such things of England, your countryman he instantly changes his tone. He may say himself bad things of his country; but he will not allow anyone

else. That is very good—very right. But I would rather have a Frenchman who is very vain of his country, and says so at every moment, than an Englishman who is very vain and pretends to disparage it. The Frenchman is more honest."

"But there are many Englishmen who think England wants great improvements," said Tita.

"Improvements! Yes. But it is another thing you hear so many Englishmen say, that their country is all wrong—'going to the dogs' is what you say for that. Well, they do not believe it true—it is impossible to be true; and they do not look well with us foreigners when they say so. For myself, I like to see a man proud of his country, whatever country it is; and if my country were England, do not you think I should be proud of her great history, and her great men, and her powers of filling the world with colonies, and—what I think most of all—her courage in making the country free to every man, and protecting opinions that she herself does not believe, because it is right? When my countrymen hear Englishmen talk like that, they cannot understand."

You should have seen our Bell's face—the pride and the gratitude that were in her eyes, while she did not speak.

"You would not have us go about praising ourselves for doing right?" said Tita.

"No," he said, "but you ought not to go about pro-

fessing yourselves to be less satisfied with your country than you are."

Before breaking up for the night, we came to a reckoning about our progress, and probable line of route. Fifty-eight miles—that was the exact distance, by straight road, we had got on our way to Scotland at the end of the third day.

"And to-morrow," said Tita, as she finished giving the Lieutenant his first lesson in bezique, "counts for nothing, as we remain here. Fifty-eight miles in three days looks rather small, does it not? But I suppose we shall get there in course of time."

"Yes," said Bell, gently, as she put the markers straight, "in Pollux' course of time."

My Lady rose, and in her severest tones ordered the girl to bed.

[*Note by Queen Titania.*—"If these jottings of our journey come to be published, I beg to say that, so far as I appear in them, they are a little unfair. I hope I am not so very terrible a person as all that comes to. I have noticed in some *other* families that a man of *obstinate will* and of *uncertain temper* likes nothing so much as to pretend to his friends that he suffers dreadfully from the tyranny of his wife. It is merely self-complacency. He knows no one dares thwart him; and so he thinks it rather humorous to give himself the air of being much injured, and of being very good-natured. I dare say, however, most people who look at these memoranda will be able to decide whether the trifling misunderstandings—which have been much exaggerated and made to look *serious*—were owing to me. But as for Bell, I do not think it right to joke about her position at all. She does her best to keep up her spirits—and she is a brave, good girl, who likes to be cheerful if only for the sake of those around her; but this affair of

Arthur Ashburton is causing her *deep anxiety* and a good deal of vexation. Why she should have some vague impression that she has treated him badly, I cannot see; for the very reverse is the case. But surely it is unfair to make this *lovers' quarrel* the pretext for dragging Bell into a wild romance, which the writer of the foregoing pages seems bent on doing. Indeed, with regard to this subject, I cannot do better than repeat a conversation which, with *characteristic ingenuity*, he has entirely omitted. He said to me, while we were wandering about Bensington—and Bell had strolled on with Count von Rosen—

"'After all, our phaeton is not a microcosm. We have not the complete elements for a romance. We have no villain with us.'

"'You flatter yourself,' I remarked; which did not seem to please him, but he pretended not to hear.

"'There will be no dark background to our adventures—no crime, secrecy, plotting, or malicious thwarting of Bell's happiness. It will be like a magic-lantern slide with all the figures painted in rose-colour.'

"'What do you mean by Bell's happiness?' I asked.

"'Her marriage with the Lieutenant, and there is no villain to oppose it. Even if we had a villain, there is no room for him: the phaeton only holds four comfortably.'

"Really this was too much. I could scarcely control my *impatience* with such folly. I have said before that the girl does not wish to marry anyone; but if there were any thought of marriage in her mind, surely her anxiety about that letter points *in a different way*. Of course I was immediately taunted with scheming to throw Bell and Count von Rosen together during our drive. I admit that I did so, and mean to do so. We ought not to expect young folks to be always delighted with the society of their elders. It is only natural that these two young people should become companions; but what of that? And as to the speech about a villain, who ever saw one? Out of a novel or a play, I never saw a villain, and I don't know anybody who ever did. It seems to me there is a good deal of self-satisfaction in the notion that we four are all so *angelic* that it wants some disagreeable person to throw us into relief. Are we all painted in rose-colour? Looking back over these pages, I do not think so; but I am not surprised—considering *who had the wielding of the brush*. And yet I think we have so far enjoyed ourselves very well, considering that I am supposed to be very hard to please, and very quarrelsome. Perhaps none of us are so amiable as we ought to be; and yet we manage to

put up with one another somehow. In the meantime, I am grieved to see Bell, without the intervention of any villain whatever, undergoing great anxiety; and I wish the girl had sufficient courage to sit down at once and write to Arthur Ashburton and absolutely forbid him to do anything so foolish as seek an interview with her. If he should do so, it is impossible to say what may come of it, for our Bell has a good deal of pride with all her gentleness.—T."]

CHAPTER VII.

ATRA CURA.

"O gentle wind that bloweth south,
To where my love repaireth,
Convey a kiss to his dear mouth,
And tell me how he fareth!"

"My dear, you are unphilosophical. Why should you rebuke Bell for occasionally using one of those quaint American phrases, which have wandered into this country? I can remember a young person who had a great trick of quoting Italian—especially in moments of tenderness—but that was a long time ago—and perhaps she has forgotten——"

"It is shameful of you," says Queen Titania, hastily, "to encourage Bell in that way. She would never do anything of the kind but for you. And you know very well that quoting a foreign language is quite a different thing from using those stupid Americanisms which are only fit for negro-concerts."

"My dear, you are unphilosophical. When America started in business on her own account, she forgot to furnish herself with an independent language; but ever since she has been working hard to supply the want. By and by you will find an American language—sharp, concise, expressive—built on the diffuse and heavy foundations of our own English. Why should not Bell use those tentative phrases which convey so much in so few syllables? Why call it slang? What is slang but an effort at conciseness?"

Tita looked puzzled, vexed, and desperate: and inadvertently turned to Count von Rosen, who was handing the sugar-basin to Bell. He seemed to understand the appeal, for he immediately said—

"Oh, but you do know, that is not the objection. I do not think Mademoiselle talks in that way, or should be criticised about it by anyone; but the wrong that is done by introducing the slang words is, that it destroys the history of a language. It perverts the true meaning of roots—it takes away the poetry of derivations—it confuses the student."

"And who thought of students when the various objects in life were named? And whence came the roots? And is not language always an experiment, producing fresh results as people find it convenient, and leaving students to frame laws as they like? And why are we to give up succinct words or phrases because

the dictionaries of the last generation consecrated them to a particular use? My dear children, the process of inventing language goes on from year to year, changing, modifying, supplying, and building up new islands out of the common sand and the sea. What to-day is slang, to-morrow is language, if one may be permitted to parody Feuerbach. And I say that Bell, having an accurate ear for fit sounds, shall use such words as she likes; and if she can invent epithets of her own——"

"But, please, I don't wish to do anything of the kind," says Bell, looking quite shamefaced.

That is just the way of those women: interfere to help them in a difficulty, and they straightway fly over to the common enemy, especially if he happens to represent a social majority.

I began to perceive about this stage of our journey that a large number of small articles over which Bell had charge were now never missing. Whenever she wanted a map, or a guide-book, or any one of the things which had been specially entrusted to her, it was forthcoming directly. Nay, she never had, like Tita, to look for a hat, or a shawl, or a scarf, or a packet of bezique-cards. I also began to notice that when she missed one of those things, she somehow inadvertently turned to our Lieutenant, who was quite sure to know where it was, and to hand it to her on the instant. The con-

sequence on this morning was, that when we all came down prepared to go out for an exploration of Oxford, we found Bell at the window of the coffee-room, already dressed, and looking placidly out into the High Street, where the sunlight was shining down on the top of the old-fashioned houses opposite, and on the brand-new bank, which, as a compliment to the prevailing style of the city, has been built in very distinguished Gothic.

It was proposed that we should first go down and have a look at Christ Church.

"And that will just take us past the post-office," said Bell.

"Why, how do you know that? Have you been out?" asked Titania.

"No," replied Bell, simply. "But Count von Rosen told me where it was."

"Oh, I have been all over the town this morning," said the Lieutenant, carelessly. "It is the finest town that I have yet seen—a sort of Gothic Munich, but old, very old—not new, and white like Munich, where the streets are asking you to look at their fine buildings. And I have been down to the river—that is very fine, too—even the appearance of the old colleges and buildings from the meadows—that is wonderful."

"Have you made any other discoveries this morning?" said Queen Tita, with a gracious smile.

"Yes," said the young man, lightly. "I have dis-

covered that the handsome young waiter who gave us our breakfast—that he has been a rider in a circus, which I did suspect myself, from his manner and attitudes—and also an actor. He is a very fine man, but not much spirit. I was asking him this morning why he is not a soldier. He despises that, because you pay a shilling a day. That is a pity your soldiers are not—what shall I say?—respectable; that your best young men do not like to go with them, and become under-officers. But I do not know he is very good stuff for a soldier—he smiles too much, and makes himself pleasant. Perhaps that is only because he is a waiter."

"Have you made any other acquaintances this morning?" says Tita, with a friendly amusement in her eyes.

"No, no one—except the old gentleman who did talk politics last night. He is gone away by the train to Birmingham."

"Pray when do you get up in the morning?"

"I did not look that; but there was no one in the streets when I went out, as there would be in a German town; and even now there is a great dulness. I have inquired about the students—they are all gone home—it is a vacation. And a young lady in a book-shop told me that there is no life in the town when the students are gone—that all places close early—that even the

milliners' shops are closed just now at half-past seven, while they are open till nine when the students are here."

"And what," says my Lady, with a look of innocent wonder, "what have the students to do with milliners' shops that such places should be kept open on *their* account?"

No one could offer a sufficient solution of this problem; and so we left the coffee-room and plunged into the glare of the High Street.

It would be useless to attempt here any detailed account of that day's long and pleasant rambling through Oxford. To anyone who knows the appearance and the associations of the grand old city—who is familiar with the various mass of crumbling colleges, and quiet cloisters, and grassy quadrangles—who has wandered along the quaint clean streets that look strangely staid and orthodox, and are as old as the splendid elms that break in continually on the lines and curves of the prevailing architecture—to one who has even seen the city at a distance, with its many spires and turrets set amid fair green meadows, and girt about with the silver windings of streams—any such brief recapitulation would be wholly bald and useless; while he to whom Oxford is unknown can learn nothing of its beauties and impressions without going there. Our party absolutely refused to go sight-seeing, and were quite content to

accept the antiquarian researches of the guide-books on credit. It was enough for us to ramble leisurely through the old courts and squares and alleys, where the shadows lay cool under the gloomy walls, or under avenues of magnificent elms.

But first of all we paid a more formal visit to Christ Church, and on our way thither the Lieutenant stopped Bell at the post-office. She begged leave to ask for letters herself; and presently reappeared with two in her hand.

"These are from the boys," she said to my Lady: "there is one for you, and one for Papa."

"You have had no letter?" said Tita.

"No," answered Bell, somewhat gravely as I fancied; and for some time after she seemed rather thoughtful and anxious.

As we paused underneath the archway in front of the sunlit quadrangle of Christ Church, the letters from the boys were read aloud. This is the first one, which shows the pains a boy will take to write properly to his mother, especially when he can lay his hands on some convenient guide-book to correspondence:—

"Cowley House, Twickenham.

"My dear Mamma,—I take up my pen to let you know that I am quite well, and hope that this will find you in the engoyment of good health. My studdies

are advancing favably, and I hope I shall continue to please my teacher and my dear parents, who have been so kind to me, and are anxious for my wellfare. I look foward with much delight to the aproarching hollidays, and I am, my dear Mamma,

"Your affectionate Son,

"JACK.

"P.S.—He does gallop so; and he eats beans."

Master Tom, on the other hand, showed that the fear of his mother was not on him when he sat down to write. Both of them had evidently just been impressed with the pony's galloping; for the second letter was as follows:—

"COWLEY HOUSE, TWICKENHAM.

"MY DEAR PAPA,—He does gallop so, you can't think [this phrase, as improper, was hastily scored through] and I took him down to the river and the boys were very Impertinent and I rode him down to the river and they had to run away from their clothes and he went into the river a good bit and was not afraid but you know he cannot swim yet as he is very young Harry French says and Doctor Ashburton went with us yesterday my dear papa to the ferry and Dick was taken over in the ferry and we all went threw the trees by Ham House and up to Ham Common and back by

Richmond bridge and Dick was not a bit Tired. But what do you think my dear papa Doctor Ashburton says all our own money won't pay for his hay and corn and he will starve if you do not send some please my dear papa to send some at once because if he starvves once he will not get right again and the Ostler says he is very greedy but he his a very good pony and very intelgent dear papa Doctor Ashburton has bawt us each a riding-whip but I never hit him over the ears which the Ostler says is dangerus and you must tell the German gentleman that Jack and I are very much obled [scored out] obledg [also scored out] obbliged to him, and send our love to him and to dear Auntie Bell and to dear Mamma and I am my dear papa your affexnate son.

"Tom."

"It is really disgraceful," said the mother of the scamps, "the shocking way those boys spell. Really Doctor Ashburton must be written to. At their age, and with such letters as these—it is shameful."

"I think they are very clever boys," said Bell, "and I hope you won't impose extra lessons on them just as they have got a pony."

"They ought not to have had the pony until they had given a better account of themselves at school," said my Lady, severely; to which Bell only replied

by saying, in a pensive manner, that she wished she was a boy of nine years of age, just become possessed of a pony, and living in the country.

We spent a long time in Christ Church, more especially in the magnificent Hall, where the historical portraits greatly interested Bell. She entered into surmises as to the sensations which must have been felt by the poets and courtiers of Queen Elizabeth's time when they had to pay compliments to the thin-faced, red-haired woman who is here represented in her royal satins and pearls; and wondered whether, after they had celebrated her as the Queen of Beauty, they afterwards reconciled these flatteries to their conscience by looking on them as sarcasm. But whereas Bell's criticism of the picture was quite gentle and unprejudiced, there was a good deal more of acerbity in the tone in which Queen Tita drew near to speak of Holbein's Henry VIII. My firm belief is, that the mother of those two boys at Twickenham, if she only had the courage of her opinions—and dared to reveal those secret sentiments which now find expression in decorating our bedrooms with missal-like texts, and in the use of Ritualistic phrases to describe ordinary portions of the service and ordinary days of the year—would really be discovered to be——but let that pass. What harm Henry VIII. had done her, I could not make out.

Anyone may perceive that that monarch has not the look of an ascetic; that the contour of his face and the setting of his eyes are not particularly pleasing; that he could not easily be mistaken for Ignatius Loyola. But why any woman of these present days, who subscribes to Mudie's, watches the costumes of the Princess of Wales, and thinks that Dr. Pusey has been ungenerously treated, should regard a portrait of Henry VIII. as though he had done her an injury only the week before last, it is not easy to discover. Bell, on the other hand, was discoursing to the Lieutenant about the various workmanship of the pictures, and giving him a vast amount of information about technical matters, in which he appeared to take a deep interest.

"But did you ever paint upon panel yourself, Mademoiselle?" he asked.

"Oh yes," said Bell, "I was at one time very fond of it. But I never made it so useful as a countryman of mine once suggested it might be. He was a Cumberland farmer who had come down to our house at Ambleside; and when he saw me painting on a piece of wood, he looked at it with great curiosity.

"'Heh, lass,' he said, 'thou's pentin a fine pictur there, and on wood, too. Is't for the yell-house?'

"'No,' I said, explaining that I was painting for

my own pleasure, and that it was not a public-house sign.

"'To please thysel, heh? And when thou's dune wi' the pictur, thou canst plane it off the wood, and begin another—that's thy meanin', is't?'

"I was very angry with him, for I was only about fifteen then, and I wanted to send my picture to a London exhibition."

"Why, I did see it down at Leatherhead!" said Von Rosen. "Was not that the picture, on panel, near the window of the dining-room?"

"Come, come!" said Titania to the girl, who could not quite conceal the pleasure she felt on hearing that the Count had noticed this juvenile effort of hers; "come along, and let us see the library before we go into the open air again."

In the library, too, were more portraits and pictures, in which these young people were much interested. We found it impossible to drag them along. They would loiter in some corner or other, and then, when we forsook our civil attendant and went back for them, we found them deeply engrossed in some obscure portrait or buried in a huge parchment-bound folio which the Lieutenant had taken out and opened. Bell was a fairly well-informed young woman, as times go, and knew quite as much of French literature as was good for her; but it certainly puzzled Tita and

myself to discover what possible interest she could have in gazing upon the large pages of the Encyclopædia, while the Lieutenant talked to her about D'Alembert. Nor could it be possible that a young lady of her years and pursuits had imbibed so much reverence for original editions as to stand entranced before this or that well-known author whose earliest offspring had been laid hold of by her companion. They both seemed unwilling to leave this library; but Von Rosen explained the matter when he came out—saying that he had never felt so keenly the proverbial impulses of an Uhlan as when he found himself with these valuable old books in his hand, and only one attendant near. I congratulated the authorities of Christ Church on what they had escaped.

Of course we went down to the river some little time after lunch; and had a look from Folly Bridge on the various oddly-assorted crews that had invaded the sacred waters of the Isis in the absence of the University men. When the Lieutenant proposed that we, too, should get a boat and make a voyage down between the green meadows, it almost seemed as if we were venturing into a man's house in the absence of the owner; but then Bell very prettily and urgently added her supplications, and Tita professed herself not unwilling to give the young folks an airing on the stream. There were plenty of signs that it was

vacation-time besides the appearance of the non-descript oarsmen. There was a great show of painting and scraping and gilding visible among that long line of mighty barges that lay under the shadow of the elms, moored to tall white poles that sent a line of silver down into the glassy and troubled water beneath. Barges in blue, and barges in cream and gold, barges with splendid prows and Gorgon figure-heads, barges with steam-paddles and light awnings over the upper deck, barges with that deck supported by pointed arches, as if a bit of an old cloister had been carried down to decorate a pleasure-boat—all these resounded to the blows of hammers, and were being made bright with many colours. The University barge itself had been dragged out of the water, and was also undergoing the same process; although the cynical person who had put the cushions in our boat had just remarked, with something of a shrug—

"I hope that the mahn as has got the job 'll get paid for it, for the 'Varsity Crew are up to their necks in debt, that's what they are!"

When once we had got away from Christ Church meadows, there were fewer obstructions in our course; but whether it was that the currents of the river defied the skill of our coxswain, or whether it was that the Lieutenant and Bell, sitting together in the stern, were too much occupied in pointing out to

each other the beauties of the scenery, we found ourselves with a fatal frequency running into the bank, with the prow of the boat hissing through the rushes and flags. Nevertheless, we managed to get up to Iffley, and there, having moored the boat, we proceeded to land and walk up to the old church on the brow of the hill.

"It's what they calls eerly English," said the old lady who showed us over the ancient building. She was not a talkative person; she was accustomed to get over the necessary information rapidly; and then spent the interval in looking strangely at the tall Lieutenant and his brown beard. She did not betray any emotion when a small gratuity was given her. She had not even said "Thank you" when Von Rosen, on calling for the keys of the church, had found the gate of her garden unhinged, and had laboured fully ten minutes in hammering a rusty piece of iron into the wooden post. Perhaps she thought it was Bell who had driven down the gate; but at all events she expressed no sense of gratitude for its restoration.

Near an old yew-tree there was a small grave—new-made and green with grass—on which some careful hand had placed a cross composed exclusively of red and white roses. This new grave, with these fresh evidences of love and kindly remembrance on it, looked

strange in the rude old churchyard, where stones of unknown age and obliterated names lay tumbled about or stood awry among the weeds and grass. Yet this very disorder and decay, as Tita said gently, seemed to her so much more pleasant than the cold and sharp precision of the iron crosses in French and German grave-yards, with their grim, fantastic decorations and wreaths of immortelles. She stood looking at this new grave and its pretty cross of roses, and at the green and weather-worn stones, and at the black old yew-tree, for some little time; until Bell—who knows of something that happened when Tita was but a girl, and her brother scarcely more than a child—drew her gently away from us, towards the gate of the churchyard.

"Yes," said the Lieutenant, not noticing, but turning to the only listener remaining; "that is true. I think your English churchyards in the country are very beautiful—very picturesque—very pathetic indeed. But what you have not in this country are the beautiful songs about death that we have—not religious hymns, or anything like that—but small, little poems that the country-people know and repeat to their children. Do you know that one that says—

Hier schlummert das Herz,
Befreit von betäubenden Sorgen;
Es weckt uns kein Morgen
Zu grösserem Schmerz.

And it ends this way—

Was weinest denn du?
Ich trage nun muthig mein Leiden,
Und rufe mit Freuden,
Im Grabe ist Ruh'!

There was one of my comrades in the war—he was from my native place, but not in my regiment—he was a very good fellow—and when he was in the camp before Metz, his companion was killed. Well, he buried him separate from the others, and went about till he got somewhere a gravestone, and he began to cut out, just with the end of a bayonet, these two verses on the stone. If took him many weeks to do that; and I did hear from one of my friends in the regiment that two days after he had put up the stone, he was himself killed. Oh, it is very hard to have your companion killed beside you, and he is away from his friends, and when you go back home without him—they look at you as if you had no right to be alive and their son dead. That is very hard—I knew it in Sixty-six, when I went back to Berlin, and had to go to see old Madame von Hebel. I do hope never to have that again."

Is there a prettier bit of quiet river-scenery in the world than that around Iffley Mill? Or was it merely the glamour of the white day that rendered the place so lovely, and made us linger in the open stream to

look at the mill and its surroundings? As I write, there lies before me a pencil sketch of our Bell's, lightly dashed here and there with water-colour, and the whole scene is recalled. There is the dilapidated old stone building, with its red tiles, its crumbling plaster, its wooden projections, and small windows, half-hidden amid foliage. Further down the river there are clumps of rounded elms visible; but here around the mill the trees are chiefly poplars, of magnificent height, that stretch up lightly and gracefully into a quiet yellow sky, and throw gigantic lines of reflection down into the still water. Then out from the mill a small island runs into the stream; the woodwork of the sluice-gates bridges the interval; there is a red cow amid the green leafage of the island, and here again are some splendid poplars, rising singly up from the river-side. Then beyond is another house, then a wooden bridge, and a low line of trees; and finally the river, in a sharp curve, glimmers in the light and loses itself behind low-lying meadows and a marginal growth of willow and flag.

For very shame's sake, the big Lieutenant was forced to offer to take Tita's oar, as we once more proceeded on our voyage; but she definitely refused to endanger our lives by any such experiment. A similar offer on the part of Bell met with a similar fate. Indeed,

when this little woman has once made up her mind to do a certain thing, the reserve of physical and intellectual vigour that lies within the slight frame and behind a smooth and gentle face, shows itself to be extraordinary. Place before her some arithmetical conundrum that she must solve in order to question the boys, or give her an oar and engage her to pull for a certain number of miles, and the amount of patient perseverance and unobtrusive energy she will reveal will astonish most people. In the meantime, her task was easy. We were going with the stream. And so we glided on between the green banks, under the railway-bridge, past the village of Kennington, past Rose Isle, with its bowers, and tables, and beer-glasses, and lounging young fellows in white trousers and blue jackets, and so on until we got up to Sandford Lock. Here, also, we fastened the boat to the bank, close by the mill, and went ashore for half an hour's stroll. But while Tita made direct, as she generally does on entering a new village, for the church, the Lieutenant went off in quest of beer; and when we came back to the boat, he had a wonderful story to tell us. He had made friends with some innkeeper or other, and had imbibed from him a legend which was a curious mixture of fact and inference and blunder. Von Rosen had doubtless mistaken much of the Oxfordshire *patois;* for how could

any man make a reasonable narrative out of the following?—

"And he told me it was a farmer's house in the village—the village of Sandford, I suppose—and while they took it down to repair it, they were lifting up the floors, and many strange things were there. And he said, among the nonsense and useless rubbish they were finding there, was a hat; and the man brought the hat down to him; and he saw it was a chevalier's hat——"

"A cavalier's hat," suggested Bell; and the Lieutenant assented.

"Then the farmer went up to the house, and he found some hidden letters, and one was to Ettrick—to some soldier who was then on a campaign at the river Ettrick in the north. And they found that it was in this very house that King Charles the First did cut off his beard and moustache—I suppose when he was flying from the Parliamentary army; but I am forgetting all about that history now, and the innkeeper was not sure about the battle. Well, then, the news was sent to London; and a gentleman came down who is the only surviving descender—descendant—of King Charles, and he took away the hat to London, and you will find it in the British Museum. It is a very curious story, and I would have come after you, and showed you the house; but I suppose

it is a new house now, and nothing to look at. But do you know when the king was in this neighbourhood in escaping?"

Here was a poser for the women.

"I don't remember," says Tita, looking very profound, "to have seen anything about Oxford in Lord Clarendon's narrative of the king's escape after the battle of Worcester."

"Mamma!" said Bell, in accents of reproach, "that was Charles the Second."

"To be sure it was," returned Tita, with a gesture of impatience; "and he couldn't have come this way, for he went to Bristol. But Charles the First was continually at Oxford—he summoned the Parliament to meet him here——"

"And shaved off his beard to curry favour with them," it is suggested.

"You needn't laugh. Of course, when he was finally defeated he fled from Oxford, and very probably disguised himself."

"And when did he fly, and whither?"

"To Scotland," said Bell triumphantly, "and after the battle of Naseby."

"Good girl. And where is Naseby?"

"Well, if he fled north-east from the Parliamentary army, Naseby must be in the south-west; and so I suppose it is somewhere down about Gloucester."

"Herr Professor Oswald, where is Naseby?"

"I do not know," says the Lieutenant; "but I think it is more in the north, and not far from the country of your great man Hampden. But he was killed before then, I think."

"And pray," says Queen Tita, taking her seat, and putting her oar into the rowlock, "will you please tell me what you think of those men—of Cromwell and Hampden and those—and what your historians say of them in Germany?"

"Why, they say all kinds of things about them," said the Lieutenant, lightly—not knowing that he was being questioned as a representative of the feudal aristocracy of a country in which the divine right of kings is supposed to flourish—"just as your historians do here. But we know very well that England has got much of her liberty through that fight with the king, and yet you have been able to keep a balance, and not let the lowest classes run riot and destroy your freedom. They were ambitious? Yes. If a man is in politics, does not he fight hard to make his side win? If he is a soldier, does not he like to be victorious? And if I could be King of England, do you not think I should like that very well, and try hard for it? But if these men had their own ambitions, and wanted to get fame and honour, I am sure they had much of righteousness and belief, and

would not have fought in that way and overturned the king if they believed that was an injury to their country or to their religion. And besides what could this man or that man have done except he had a great enthusiasm of the nation behind him—if he did not represent a principle? But I have no right to speak of such things as if I were telling you of our German historians. That is only my guess, and I have read not much about it. But you must not suppose that because we in Germany have not the same political system that you have, that we cannot tell the value of yours, and the good it has done to the character of your people. Our German historians are many of them professors in universities, and they spend their lives in finding out the truth of such things; and do you think they care what may be the opinion of their own government about it? Oh, no. They are very independent in the universities—much too independent, I think. It is very pleasant when you are a very young man, to get into a university, and think yourself very wise, and go to extremes about politics, and say hard things of your own country; but when you come out into the world, and see how you have to keep your country from enemies that are not separated by the sea from you (as you are here in England), you see how bad are these principles among young men, who do not like

to be obedient, and always want to hurry on new systems of government before such things are possible. But you do not see much of those wild opinions when a war comes, and the young men are marched together to save their country. Then they forget all the democratic notions of this kind—it is their heart that speaks, and it is on fire—and not one is ashamed to be patriotic, though he may have laughed at it a week before."

"It must be very hard," said Bell, looking away at the river, "to leave your home and go into a foreign country, and know that you may never return."

"Oh, no; not much," said the Lieutenant; "for all your friends go with you. And you are not always in danger—you have much entertainment at times, especially when some fight is over, and all your friends meet again to have a supper in the tent, and some one has got a bottle of cognac, and some one else has got a letter from home, full of gossip about people you know very well. And there is much fun, too, in riding over the country, and trying to find food and quarters for yourself and your horse. We had many good parties in the deserted farmhouses, and sometimes we caught a hen or a duck that the people had neglected to take, and then we kindled a big fire, and killed him, and fixed him on a lance,

and roasted him well, feathers and all. Then we were very lucky—to have a fire, and good meat, and a roof to keep off the rain. But it was more dangerous in a house—for it was difficult to keep from sleeping after you had got warm and had eaten and drunk perhaps a little too much wine—and there were many people about ready to fire at you. But these are not heroic stories of a campaign, are they, Mademoiselle?"

Nevertheless, Mademoiselle seemed sufficiently interested; and as Tita and I pulled evenly back to Iffley and Oxford, she continually brought the Lieutenant back to this subject by a series of questions. This modern maiden was as anxious to hear of the amusements of patrols, and the hair-breadth escapes of dare-devil sub-lieutenants, as was Desdemona to listen to her lover's stories of battles, sieges, fortunes, and moving accidents by flood and field.

That was a pleasant pull back to Oxford, in the quiet of the summer afternoon, with the yellow light lying warmly over the level meadows and the woods. There were more people now along the banks of the river—come out for the most part in couples to wander along the pathway between the stream and the fields. Many of them had a good look at our Bonny Bell; and the Radley boys, as they sent their long boats spinning down the river towards Sandford, were apparently much struck. Bell, unconscious of the inno-

cent admiration of those poor boys, was attending much more to the talk of our Uhlan than to her tiller-ropes. As for him—but what man would not have looked contented under these conditions—to be strong, healthy, handsome, and only twenty-five; to have comfortable means and an assured future; to have come out of a long and dangerous campaign with honour and sound limbs; to be off on a careless holiday through the most beautiful country, take it for all in all, in the world; and to be lying lazily in a boat on a summer's evening, on a pretty English river, with a pretty English girl showing her friendly interest and attention in every glance of her blue eyes?

You should have seen how naturally these two fell behind us, and formed a couple by themselves, when we had left the boat and were returning to our inn. But as we walked up to Carfax, Bell separated herself from us for a moment and went into the post-office. She was a considerable time there. When she came out, she was folding up a letter which she had been reading.

"You have got your letter at last," said Tita.

"Yes," said Bell, gravely, but showing no particular gladness or disappointment.

At dinner she was rather reserved; and so, curiously enough, was the Lieutenant. After dinner, when we

were allowed half an hour by ourselves for a cigar, he suddenly said—

"Why do you not interfere with that stupid young fellow?"

"Who?" I asked, in blank amazement.

"Why, that young fellow at Twickenham—it is quite monstrous, his impertinence. If I were the guardian of such a girl, I would kick him—I would throw him into the river and cool him there."

"What in all the world do you mean?"

"Why, you must know. The letter that Miss Bell did ask for more than once, it is from him; and now when it comes, it is angry, it is impertinent—she is nearly crying all the time at dinner. *Sackerment!* It is for some one to interfere, and save her from this insult—this persecution——"

"Don't bite your cigar to pieces, but tell me, if you please, how you happen to know what was in the letter."

"She told me," said the Lieutenant, sullenly.

"When?"

"Just before you came down to dinner. It is no business of mine—no; but when I see her vexed and disturbed, I asked her to tell me why; and then she said she had got this letter, which was a very cruel one to send. Oh, there is no mystery—none. I suppose he has a right to marry her—very well; but

he is not married yet, and he must not be allowed to do this."

"Bell at least might have told me of it, or have confided in Tita——"

"Oh, she is telling her now, I dare say. And she will tell you too, when there are not all of us present. It is no secret, or she would not have told me. Indeed, I think she was very sorry about that; but she was very much vexed, and I asked her so plain, that she answered me. And that is much better to have confidence between people, instead of keeping all such vexations to yourself. Then I ask her why he is angry? and she says only because she has gone away. Pfui! I have never heard such nonsense!"

"My dear Oswald," I say to him, "don't you interfere between two young people who have fallen out, or you will suffer. Unless, indeed——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless they happen to be angels."

"Do you know this—that he is coming to see her?"

"Well, the phaeton can hold five at a pinch. Why should not we have an addition to our party?"

"Very good. I do not care. But if he is rude to her, he will not be very long in the phaeton."

"Why, you stupid boy, you take these lovers quarrels *au grand sérieux*. Do you think he has been positively rude to her? Nothing of the kind. He has

been too well brought up for that, although he has a peevish temper. He might be with us all through the journey——"

"*Jott bewahre!*" exclaimed the Count, with a kick at a cork that was lying on the carpet.

"—And these two might be at daggers drawn and you would see nothing of it. Indeed, young people never get extremely courteous to each other until they quarrel and stand on their dignity. Now, if you had seen that letter, you would have found it respectful and formal in the highest degree perhaps a trifle sarcastic here and there, for the lad unhappily thinks he has a gift that way—but you would find no rhetorical indignation or invective."

The Count threw his cigar into the grate.

"They will be waiting for us," he said; "let us go."

We found Tita with the bezique-cards spread out before her. Bell looked up with rather a frightened air, apparently conscious that the Lieutenant was likely to have spoken about what she had confided to him at the impulse of a momentary vexation. However, we sat down.

The game was an open and palpable burlesque. Was Ferdinand very intent on giving checkmate when he played chess with Miranda in the cave; or was he not much more bent upon placing his king in extreme danger and offering his queen so that she had to be

taken? The audacious manner in which this young Lieutenant played his cards so as to suit Bell was apparent to everyone, though no one dared speak of it, and Bell only blushed sometimes. When she timidly put forth a ten, he was sure to throw away another ten, although he had any amount of aces in his hand. He spoiled his best combinations rather than take tricks when it was clear she wanted to lead. Nay, as he sat next to her, he undertook the duty of marking her various scores, and the manner in which the small brass hand went circling round the card was singular, until Tita suddenly exclaimed—

"Why, that is only a common marriage!"

"And do you not count forty for a common marriage?" he said, with a fine assumption of innocent wonder.

Such was the ending of our first day's rest; and then, just before candles were lit, a Cabinet Council was held to decide whether on the morrow we should choose as our halting-place Moreton-in-the-Marsh or Bourton-on-the-Hill. The more elevated site won the day.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEAR WOODSTOCK TOWN.

"In olde dayes of the king Arthoúr,
Of which that Britons speake great honoúr,
All was this land full filled of faerie ;
The Elf-queen, with her jolly company,
Danced full oft in many a green mead.
This was the old opinion, as I read ;
I speak of many a hundred years ago ;
But now can no man see no elves mo'."

The phaeton stood in the High Street of Oxford. Castor and Pollux, a trifle impatient after the indolence of the day before, were pawing the hard stones, their silken coats shining in the morning sunlight; Queen Titania had the reins in her hands; the tall waiter who had been a circus-rider was ready to smile us an adieu; and we were all waiting for the Lieutenant, who had gone off in search of a map that Bell had forgotten.

If there is one thing more than another likely to ruffle the superhuman sweetness of my Lady's temper,

it is to be kept waiting in a public thoroughfare with a pair of rather restive horses under her charge. I began to fear for that young man. Tita turned once or twice to the entrance of the hotel; and at last she said, with an ominous politeness in her tone—

"It does seem to me singular that Count von Rosen should be expected to look after such things. He is our guest. It is no compliment to give him the duty of attending to our luggage."

"My dear," said Bell, leaning over and speaking in very penitent tones, "it is entirely my fault. I am very sorry."

"I think he is much too good-natured," says Tita, coldly.

At this Bell rather recedes, and says, with almost equal coldness—

"I am sorry to have given him so much trouble. In future I shall try to do without his help."

But when the Count did appear—when he took his seat beside Tita, and we rattled up the High Street and round by the Corn Market, and past Magdalen Church, and so out by St. Giles's Road, the remembrance of this little preliminary skirmish speedily passed away. For once more we seemed to have left towns and streets behind us, and even while there were yet small villas and gardens by the side of the road, the air that blew about on this bright morning seemed to have a new

sweetness in it, and the freshness and pleasant odours of innumerable woods and fields. There was quite a bright light, too, in Bell's face. She had come downstairs with an obvious determination to cast aside the remembrance of that letter. There was something even defiant in the manner in which she said—in strict confidence, be it observed—that if Arthur Ashburton did intend to come and meet us in some town or other, there was no use in being vexed about it in the meantime. We were now getting into the open country, where pursuit would be in vain. If he overtook us, it would be through the mechanism of railways. His only chance of obtaining an interview with Bell was to lie in wait for us in one of the big towns through which we must pass.

"But why," said the person to whom Bell revealed these matters, "why should you be afraid to meet Arthur? You have not quarrelled with him."

"No," said Bell, looking down.

"You have done nothing that he can object to."

"He has no right to object, whatever I may do," she said with a gentle firmness. "But, you know, he is annoyed, and you cannot reason with him; and I am sorry for him—and—and—and what is the name of this little village on the left?"

Bell seemed to shake off this subject from her, as too vexatious on such a fine and cheerful morning.

"That is Woolvercot; and there is the road that leads down to Godstow, and the ruins of Godstow Nunnery, in which Rosamond Clifford lived and died."

"And I suppose she rode along this very highway," said Bell, "with people wondering at her beauty and her jewels, when she used to live at Woodstock. Yet it is a very ordinary-looking road."

Then she touched Tita on the shoulder.

"Are we going to stop at Blenheim?" she asked.

"I suppose so," said our driver.

"I think we ought not," said Bell; "we shall be greatly disappointed, if we do. For who cares about the Duke of Marlborough, or Sir John Vanbrugh's architecture? You know you will be looking about the trees for the old knight with the white beard, and for Alice Lee, and for pretty Phœbe Mayflower, and for Wildrake and the soldiers. Wouldn't it be better to go past the walls, Tita, and fancy that all these old friends of ours are still walking about inside in their picturesque costume? If we go inside, we shall only find an empty park and a big house, and all those people gone away, just like the fairies who used to be in the woods."

"But what are the people you are speaking of?" said the Count. "Is it from history, or from a romance?"

"I am not quite sure," said Bell, "how much is

history, and how much is romance; but I am sure we know the people very well; and very strange things happened inside the park that we shall pass by and by. There was a pretty young lady living there, and a very sober and staid colonel was her lover. The brother of this young lady was much attached to the fortunes of the Stewarts, and he brought the young Prince Charles in disguise to the house; and all the gratitude shown by the Prince was that he began to amuse himself by making love to the sister of the man who had risked his life to save him. And of course the grave colonel discovered it, and he even drew his sword upon Prince Charles——"

"I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant, "but do not trouble to tell me the story; for I know it very well. I did read it in Germany years ago; and I think if Colonel Esmond had thrashed the Prince——"

"Oh no, you are mistaken," said Bell, with some wonder; "it is Colonel Markham, not Colonel Esmond; and the brother of the young lady succeeded in getting the Prince away just before Cromwell had time to seize him."

"Cromwell!" said our Lieutenant, thoughtfully.

"Ah, then, it is another story. But I agree with you, Mademoiselle: if you believe in these people

very much, do not go into the park, or you will be disappointed."

"As you please," said Tita, with a smile.—I began to observe that when the two young folks agreed about anything, my Lady became nothing more than an echo to their wishes.

At length we came to the walls that surrounded the great park. Should we leave all its mysteries unexplored? If one were to clamber up, and peep over, might not strange figures be seen, in buff coats and red, with bandoleers and helmets; and an aged knight with a laced cloak, slashed boots, and long sword; countrywomen in white hoods and black gowns; divines with tall Presbyterian hats and solemn visage; a braggart and drunken soldier of the king, and a colonel the servant of Cromwell? Or might not Queen Elizabeth be descried, looking out as a prisoner on the fair domains around her? Or might not Chaucer be found loitering under those great trees that he loved and celebrated in his verse? Or, behind that splendid wall of chestnuts and elms, was it not possible that Fair Rosamond herself might be walking all alone, passing like a gleam of light through the green shadows of the trees, or sitting by the well that still bears her name, or reading in the heart of that bower that was surrounded by cunning ways? Was it along this road that Eleanor came? Or did

Rosamond, surviving all her sin and her splendour, sometimes walk this way with her sister-nuns from Godstow, and think of the time when she was mistress of a royal palace and this spacious park?

We drove into the town of Woodstock. The handful of houses thrown into the circular hollow that is cut in two by the river Glym, was as silent as death. In the broad street that plunged down into the valley, scarcely a soul was to be seen; and even about the old town-hall there were only some children visible. Had the play been played out, and the actors gone for ever? When King Henry was fighting in France or in Ireland, doubtless Rosamond, left all by herself, ventured out from the park, and walked down into the small town, and revealed to the simple folks the wonders of her face, and talked to them. No mortal woman could have remained in a bower month after month without seeing anyone but her attendants. Doubtless, too, the people in this quaint little town were very loyal towards her; and would have espoused her cause against a dozen Eleanors. And so it happened, possibly, that when the romance came to an end, and Rosamond went to hide her shame and her penitence in the nunnery of Godstow, all the light and colour went out of Woodstock, and left it dull, and grey, and silent as it is to this day.

The main street of Woodstock, that dips down to

the banks of the Glym, rises as abruptly on the other side; and once past the turnpike, the highway runs along an elevated ridge, which on the one side is bounded by a continuation of Blenheim Park, and, on the other, slopes down to a broad extent of level meadows. When we had got up to this higher ground, and found before us an illimitable stretch of country, with ourselves as the only visible inhabitants, the Lieutenant managed to introduce a remote hint about a song which he had heard Bell humming in the morning.

"I think it was about Woodstock," he said; "and if you will please to sing it now, as we go along, I shall get out for you the guitar."

"If you will be so kind," said Bell, quite submissively.

What had become of the girl's independence? Asked to sing a song at great trouble to herself—for who cares to play a guitar in the back-seat of a phaeton, and with two pairs of wheels rumbling an accompaniment?—she meekly thanks him for suggesting it! Nay, it was becoming evident that the girl was schooling herself into docility. She had almost dropped entirely the wild phrases and startling metaphors that so deeply shocked Tita. Sometimes they dropped out inadvertently; and sometimes, too, she gave way to those impulsive imaginative flights that led her un-

thinkingly into an excitement of talk which Tita used to regard with a sort of amused wonder. But of late all these things were gradually disappearing. She was less abrupt, independent, wayward in her manner. She waited more patiently to receive suggestions from others. She was becoming a good listener; and she received meekly criticisms that would, but a short time before, have driven her into a proud and defiant silence, or provoked some rejoinder a good deal more apt than gentle. It was very odd to mark this amiable self-discipline struggling with her ordinary frank impetuosity; although sometimes, it is true, the latter had the best of it.

On this occasion, when the Lieutenant had jumped down and got out the guitar for her, she took it very obediently; and then Tita rested the horses for a little while under the shadow of some overhanging trees. Of course you know the ballad that Bell naturally turned to, seeing where she was at the moment, and the sort of music she was most familiar with.

"Near Woodstock town I chanced to stray,
When birds did sing and fields were gay,
And by a glassy river's side
A weeping damsel I espied."

This was what she sang, telling the story of the forlorn maiden who was found weeping for her faithless lover, who only wished that he might come and visit

her grave, and think of her as "one who loved, but could not hate." Perhaps this old-fashioned ballad is not a masterly composition; but the music of it is expressive enough; and we who were familiar with Bell's ballads had got into a habit of not caring much what she sang, as long as she only continued singing.

"You would make your fortune by singing," said Tita, as Bell finished, and the horses were sent forward.

"Perhaps," said the girl, "if all my audience were like you. But I think you must have been lent out as an infant to an old woman with an organ, and so, by merely sitting on the vibrating wood, you have become so sensitive to music that anything at all pleases you."

"No, Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant, "you do yourself an injustice. I never heard a voice like yours, that has the tremble of a zither in it, and is much softer than a zither."

Bell blushed deeply: but to conceal her embarrassment, she said lightly to Tita—

"And how am I to make my fortune? Oh, I know, —by coming in after public dinners, to sing grace, and follow the toasts with a glee. I am in white silk, with a blue ribbon round my neck, white gloves, bracelets, and a sheet of music. There is an elderly lady in black velvet and white pearls, who smiles in a pleasant

manner—she sings, and is much admired by the long rows of gentlemen—they have just dined, you know, and are very nice and amiable. Then there is the tenor—fair and smooth, with diamond rings, a lofty expression, and a cool and critical eye, that shows he is quite accustomed to all this. Then there is the stout, red-bearded man who sings bass, and plays the piano for the four of us, and is very fierce in the way he thumps out his enthusiasm about the Queen, and the Navy, and the Army, and the Volunteers. What a happy way of living that must be! They will give us a nice dinner beforehand—in a room by ourselves, perhaps; and all we have to do is to return thanks for it in an emotional way, so that all the waiters shall stand round in a reverential manner. But when that is over, then we introduce a few songs—sprightly, coquettish songs, and the gentlemen are vastly amused—and you think——"

"Well, what do you think?" said I, seeing that Bell rather hesitated.

"I think," said Tita, with a smile, "that you are very ungenerous, Bell, in remembering so much of what you saw the other night from the gallery of the Freemasons' Tavern. Is it fair to recall, in open daylight, in the cool forenoon, the imbecile good-nature and exuberant loyalty of a lot of gentlemen who have just dined? I wonder how many of the husbands

there told their wives what sums they signed away under the influence of the wine?"

"I dare say," says one of the party, "that the wives would be sorry to see so much money go in charity which might otherwise have been squandered in millinery and extravagances."

"Don't be ill-tempered, my dear," says Queen Tita, graciously. "Women are quite as charitable as men; and they don't need a guinea dinner to make them think of other people. That is a sort of charity that begins at home. Pray how much did *you* put down?"

"Nothing."

"I thought so. Go to a charity dinner, enjoy yourself, and come away without giving a farthing. You would not find women doing that."

"Only because they have not the courage."

"They have plenty of courage in other directions —in getting married, for example, when they know what men are."

"Knowing that, is it not a pity they choose to make martyrs of themselves? Indeed, their anxiety to become martyrs is astonishing. But what if I say that in the next published list of subscriptions you will find my name down for about as much as your last millinery bill came to?"

"I think that a great deal more likely, for I know the state of philanthropy into which men get at

a public dinner—fathers of families, who ought to remember their own responsibilities, and who are impatient enough if any extra bit of comfort or kindness is wanted for their own kith and kin."

"Some such trifling matter as a fur cloak, for instance, that is bought out of a Brighton shop-window for sixty-five guineas, and is only worn twice or thrice, because some other woman has the neighbour of it."

"That is not true. You *know* the weather changed."

"The weather! what weather? Were you at Brighton at the time?"

Titania did not reply for a considerable time. Perhaps she was thinking of some crushing epigram; but at all events Bell endeavoured to draw her away from the subject by pointing out another river, and asking whether this or the Glym at Woodstock was the stream associated with the "Oxfordshire Tragedy" she had just been singing. We discovered, however, that this small stream was also the Glym, which here winds round and through the marshy country that Thomas Wharton described.[1] Bell came to the conclusion that the banks

[1] "Within some whispering osier isle,
Where Glym's low banks neglected smile:
And each trim meadow still retains
The wintry torrent's oozy stains;
Beneath a willow, long forsook,
The fisher seeks his custom'd nook; [And

by the river at this part were not sufficiently picturesque for the scene of the song, where the love-lorn heroine sits and weeps by a glassy stream, and complains that her lover is now wooing another maid.

Meanwhile, my Lady had given expression to the rebellious thoughts passing through her mind, by admonishing Castor and Pollux slightly; and these accordingly were going forward at a rattling pace. We rushed through Enstone. We dashed along the level highway that lies on the high ground between the Charlford Farms and Heythrop Park. We sent the dust flying behind us in clouds as we scudded down to Chipping Norton; and there, with a fine sweep, we cantered up the incline of the open square, clattered over the stones in front of the White Hart Inn, and pulled up with a noise that considerably astonished the quiet village.

This large open space gives to Chipping Norton a light and agreeable appearance; and on entering the big tall inn that looks down over the square, we found everything very cleanly, bright, and comfortable. The very maid-servant who served us with lunch was a

> And bursting through the crackling sedge,
> That crowns the current's caverned edge,
> He startles from the bordering wood
> The bashful wild-duck's early brood."
>
> *Ode to the First of April.*

model of maid-servants, and was a very handsome young woman besides, with shining light-blue eyes and yellow hair. The Lieutenant at once entered into a polite conversation with her, and she informed him, in answer to his respectful inquiries, that she had just come from Folkestone.

"From Folkestone! that is a seaport—a busy place—a large town, is it not?"

"Yes, there *was* some business doing there," said the maid, with an inflection of voice which rather cast discredit on Chipping Norton.

"Don't you find this place dull?" he asked.

"Well, I can't say the people seem to worry themselves much," she replied with a slight curl of the lip.

"That is very good for the health," said the Count gravely. "Now I do think you have a very nice and even temper, that does not irritate you——"

But here my Lady and her companion came into the room, and the conversation ceased; for the Lieutenant had at once to spring up and take charge of the books, maps, and scarves that Bell had brought in with her. And then, when we sat down to lunch, he was entirely engrossed in attending to her wants, insomuch that he was barely civil to the more elderly lady who had from the first been his champion. As for Bell, what had become of her dislike to officers, her

antipathy to the German race, her horror of Uhlans! That very morning I had heard on good authority that Bell had been asking in confidence whether England did not owe a great debt to Germany for the gift of Protestantism which that country had sent us. "And were not the Prussians mostly Protestant?" asked Bell. What answer was returned I do not know; for Queen Titania is strong on the point that the word "Protestant" is not scriptural.

"But I have quite forgotten to tell you," remarked the Lieutenant, "that this morning, when I was walking about in Oxford, I came into the theatre. I saw some bills up; I went along a strange passage; I found an iron gate, and much lime and stone, and things like that. A man came—I asked him if I could see the theatre, and he took me into the place, which they are repairing now. Oh, it is a very dingy place—small, tawdry, with ridiculous scenes, and the decorations of the galleries very amusing and dirty. Why, in an old city, with plenty of rich and intelligent people, you have such a pitiful little theatre?—it is only fit for a country green and wandering actors. In a great university town, you should have the theatre supported by the colleges and the bequests, and hire good actors, and play all the best dramas of your great writers. That would be a good education—that would be a good compliment to pay to your great

dramatists. But here, in a city where you have much learning, much money, much of your young men of good families being educated, you have only a dingy, small show, and I suppose it is farces they play, and wretched dramas, for the townspeople and the farmers. That is not much respect shown to your best authors by your learned institutions."

"No wonder students find the milliners' shops more attractive," said Tita with a smile.

"But I think there is always much interest in an empty theatre," continued the Lieutenant. "I did go all over this poor little building, and saw how it imitated the deceptions of fine theatres in a coarse manner. I saw the rude scenes, the bad traps, the curious arrangements, which I do not think can differ much from the theatre which Shakespeare himself described, where a man was made to represent a city, if I am right."

"You are familiar with the arrangements of a theatre, I suppose?" I say to the Lieutenant.

"Pray tell me if you saw anything else in Oxford this morning," says Tita, hastily.

"I suppose you could produce a pantomime yourself," I observe to the young man.

"Did you visit any more of the colleges?" said Tita, at the same moment.

"Or get up a ballet?"

"Or go down to the Isis again?"

Von Rosen was rather bewildered; but at last he stammered out—

"No, Madame, I did not go down to the river this morning. I walked from the theatre to the hotel; for I remained much too long in the theatre. Yes, I know something about the interior of theatres. I have been great friends with the managers and actors, and took great interest in it. I used to be much behind the stage—every night at some times; and that is very curious to a young man who likes to know more than other people, and thinks himself wise not to believe in delusions. I think it is Goethe who has made many of our young men like to know stage-managers, and help to arrange pieces. But I find that they always end by being very much in love with one of the young ladies, and then they get not to like the theatres, for they do not wish everybody to admire her and be allowed to look at her. This is very good for the theatre, however; for they take many boxes, and ask their friends to accompany them, and that pays better than to let out the seats by the year to families. Some of the young men make light of this; others are more melancholy, but afterwards they have much interest in some theatres merely for the sake of the old associations."

"Oh, Bell," exclaimed Tita, turning anxiously to our companion, "did you see that your guitar was properly put away, or has it been left lying open in the phaeton?"

"I did put it away, Madame," said the Lieutenant.

"Oh, thank you," said Tita. "I am sure if some of those ostlers were to have their curiosity aroused, we should have no more music all the journey."

And thus, having got the Lieutenant away from rambling reminiscences of theatres, the little woman took very good care he should not return to them; and so we finished luncheon without any catastrophe having happened. Bell had been sitting very quietly during these revelations, scarcely lifting her eyes from the table, and maintaining an appearance of studied indifference. Why should she care about the mention of any actress, or any dozen of actresses? My Lady's anxiety was obviously unnecessary.

CHAPTER IX.

A MOONLIGHT NIGHT.

"Till the live-long daylight fail;
Then to the spicy nut-brown ale,
With stories told of many a feat,
How faery Mab the junkets eat."

CHIPPING NORTON is supplied with all the comforts of life. Before leaving for the more inhospitable regions in which we are to pass the night, we take a leisurely walk through the curious little town, that is loosely scattered over the side of a steep slope. Here civilization has crowded all its results together; and Queen Tita is asked whether she could not forsake the busy haunts of men, and exchange that hovering between Leatherhead and London, which constitutes her existence, for a plain life in this small country town.

"Chemists' shops abound. There is a subscription reading-room. There are co-operative stores. A theatre invites you to amusement. You may have *Lloyd's*

News, various sorts of sewing machines, and the finest sherry from the wood——"

"Along with a Wesleyan chapel," she says, with a supercilious glance at the respectable, if somewhat dull-looking little building that fronts the main street.

There is no reply possible to this ungracious sneer; for who can reason, as one of us hints to her, with a woman who would spend a fortune in incense, if only she had it, and who would rejoice to run riot in tall candles?

Bell takes us away from Chipping Norton, the Lieutenant sitting beside her to moderate the vehemence of her pace in the event of her getting into a difficulty. First the road dips down by a precipitous street, then it crosses a hollow, in which there are some buildings of a manufactory, a tiny river, and a strip of common or meadow, and then it ascends to the high country beyond by a steep hill. On the summit of this hill we give the horses a rest for a few seconds, and turn to look at the small town that lies underneath us in the valley. There is a faint haze of blue smoke rising from the slates and tiles. The deadened tolling of a bell marks the conclusion of another day's labour: for already the afternoon is wearing on apace; and so we turn westward again, and set out upon the lofty highway that winds onward towards the setting sun. Small hamlets fringe the road at considerable intervals, while elsewhere our

route lies between stretches of heath and long fields. And still the highway ascends, until we reach the verge of a great slope; and, behold! there lies before us a great landscape, half in gloom, half in the dusky yellow light of the evening. And over there, partly shutting out the dark lines of hills in the west, a great veil of rain stretches from the sky to the earth, and through it the sun is shining as through ground glass. But so far away is this pale sheet of yellow mist, that we seem to be above it, and over the level and dark landscape on which it descends; and, indeed, where this veil ends, the sunlight sends forth long shafts of radiance that light up level tracts of the distant and wooded country. What fate is to befall us when we get down into this plain, and go forward in search of the unknown hostelry at which we are to pass the night?

"I hope the rain will not spread," says Bell, who had been telling us of all the wonders we should find at Bourton-on-the-Hill; "but even if it does rain to-night, we shall be as well off on a hill as in a swamp."

"But at Moreton-in-the-Marsh," says Tita, "there is sure to be a comfortable inn, for it is a big place; whereas Bourton-on-the-Hill appears to be only a small village, and we may find there only a public-house."

"But suppose it should clear?" says Bell; "the moon will be larger to-night, and then we can look down on all this level country from the top of the hill. We have

not had a night-walk for a long time, and it will be so much more pleasant than being down in the mists of a marsh."

"And you are prepared to sleep on a couple of chairs in the smoking-room of a public-house?" I ask of Miss Bell.

"I dare say we shall get accommodation of some kind," she replies, meekly.

"Oh, I am quite sure Mademoiselle is right; there is so much more adventure in going to this small place on the top of a hill," cried the Lieutenant.

Of course Mademoiselle was right. Mademoiselle was always right now. And when that was understood, Queen Titania never even attempted to offer an objection, so that in all affairs pertaining to our trip the rude force of numbers triumphed over the protests of an oppressed and long-suffering minority.

But only change the relative positions, and then what a difference there was! When the Lieutenant hinted in the remotest way that Bell might do so and so with the horses, she was all attention. For the first time in her career she allowed the interests of justice to moderate her partiality for Pollux. That animal, otherwise the best of horses, was a trifle older than his companion, and had profited by his years so far as to learn a little cunning. He had got into a trick accordingly of allowing Castor—the latter being younger and

a good deal "freer"—to take more than his share of the work. Pollux had acquired the art of looking as if he were perpetually straining at the collar, while all the time he was letting his neighbour exercise to the full that willingness which was his chief merit. Now Bell had never interfered to alter this unequal division of labour. Queen Tita knew well how to make the older horse do his fair share; but Bell encouraged him in his idleness, and permitted his companion to work out of all reason. Now, however, when the Lieutenant pointed out the different action of the horses, and said she should moderate the efforts of the one, while waking up the other to a sense of his duties, she was quite obedient. When the whip was used at all—which was seldom enough, for both horses were sufficiently free—it was Pollux that felt the silk. The Lieutenant fancied he was giving Bell lessons in driving, whereas he was only teaching her submissiveness.

That golden sheet of rain had disappeared in the west, and the yellow light had sunk further and further down behind far bands of dark cloud. A grey dusk was falling over the green landscape, and the birds were growing mute in the woods and the hedges. In the pervading silence we heard only the patter of the horses' feet and the light rolling of the phaeton, as we sped onward down the long slopes and along the plain.

We passed Four-shire-Stone, the adjacent shires being Worcester, Warwick, Gloucester, and Oxford; and then, getting on by a piece of common, we rattled into a long and straggling village, with one or two large and open thoroughfares.

Moreton-in-the-Marsh was asleep, and we left it asleep. There were still a few men lounging about the corner public-house, but the women and children had all retired into their cottages from the chill night-air. In some of the windows the light of a candle was visible. The dark elms behind the houses were growing darker.

Between Moreton and Bourton you plunge still deeper into this great and damp valley, and the way lies through a rich vegetation which seems to have thriven well in this low situation. The hedges along the roadside are magnificent; the elms behind them constitute a magnificent avenue extending for nearly a couple of miles; all around are dense woods. As we drove rapidly through this country, it almost seemed as though we could see the white mists around us, although the presence of the vapour was only known to us by the chilling touch of the air. On this July night we grew cold. Tita hoped there would be a fire at the hostelry on the top of the mountain, and she besought Bell to muffle up her throat, so that we should not be deprived of our ballads by the way.

At last we beheld the hill before us.

"It is not very like the Niessen," says Tita.

"But I have no doubt there is a very good inn at the top," remarks the Lieutenant; "for after this hill the people would naturally stop to rest their horses."

"And we shall get up to see the sun rise, as we did on the Niessen?" asks Bell, with a fine innocence; for she knows the opinions of some of us on the subject of early rising. "Do you remember the fat little woman who had walked up all by herself in the morning, and appealed to us all to tell her the names of the mountains, that she might write them down?"

"And how oddly she turned up again at nearly every railway station we stopped at, with all her luggage around her!" says Tita.

"I believe," says Bell, "she is still sailing all through Europe on a shoal of bandboxes and portmanteaus. I wish I could draw the fat little woman balancing herself in that circle of luggage, you know, and floating about comfortably and placidly like a bottle bobbing about in the sea. She may have drifted up to St. Petersburg by this time."

"I think *we* have," says the Lieutenant, who is leading the horses up the steep hill, and who rubs his chilled hands from time to time.

We reach the centre of the straggling line of houses which must be Bourton, and, behold! there is no inn. In the dusk we can descry the tower of a small church.

and here the cottages thicken into the position which ought to be dominated by an inn, but there is no sign of any such thing. Have we climbed this precipitous steep, and have Castor and Pollux laboriously dragged our phaeton and luggage up, all for nothing? The Count asks a startled villager, who points to a wayside house standing at the higher extremity of the row. Where is the familiar signboard, or the glowing bar, or the entrance to the stables? Von Rosen surrenders his charge of the horses, and walks into the plain-looking house. It is an inn. We begin to perceive in the dusk that a small board over the doorway bears the name of "SETH DYDE." We find, however, instead of a landlord, a landlady—a willing, anxious, energetic woman, who forthwith sets to work to take our party into this odd little place. For dinner or supper, just as we choose to call it, she will give us ham and eggs, with either tea or beer. She will get two bedrooms for us; and perhaps the single gentleman will accept a shake-down in the parlour. In that room a fire is lit in a trice; a lamp is brought in; and presently the cheerful blaze in the huge fire-place illuminates the curious old-fashioned chamber, with its carpets, and red table-cloth, and gloomy furniture. A large tray appears—an ornamental teapot is produced. Sounds are heard of attendants whipping through the place—so anxious and so dexterous is this good woman. And Queen Tita,

who is merciless in one respect, examines the cups, saucers, forks, and knives, and deigns to express her sense of the creditable cleanliness and order of the solitary inn.

Meanwhile, the horses.

"Oh," says the Lieutenant, coming in out of the dark, "I have found a famous fellow—the first man I have seen in England who does his work well with grooming a horse. He is an excellent fellow—I have seen nothing like it. The horses are well off this night, I can assure you — you will see how good they look to-morrow morning."

"It is strange so good an ostler should be found here," remarks Tita.

"But he is not an ostler," replies the Lieutenant, rubbing his hands at the fire; "he is a groom to some gentleman near. The ostler is away. He does his work as a favour, and he does it so that I think the gentleman must keep some racing horses."

"How do you manage to find out all these things about the people you meet?" asked Titania, with a gracious smile.

"Find out!" replied the tall young man, with his blue eyes staring. "I do not think I find out any more than others. It is people talk to you. And it is better to know a little of a man you give your horses to—and there is some time to talk when you are seeing

after the horses—and so—that is perhaps why they tell me."

"But you have not to see about your horses when you are in a bookseller's shop at nine in the morning, and the young lady there tells you about the milliners' shops and the students," says my Lady.

"Oh, she was a very nice girl," remarks the Lieutenant, as if that were sufficient explanation.

"But you talk to everyone, whether they are young ladies, or innkeepers, or grooms: is it to perfect your pronunciation of English?"

"Yes, that is it," said the young man, probably glad to arrive at any solution of the problem.

"Then you ought not to speak to ostlers."

"But there is no ostler who talks so very bad as I do—I know it is very, very bad——"

"I am *sure* you are mistaken," says Bell, quite warmly, but looking down; "I think you speak very good English—and it is a most difficult language to pronounce—and I am sure there are few Germans who can speak it as freely as you can."

"All that is a very good compliment, Mademoiselle," he said, with a laugh that caused Bell to look rather embarrassed. "I am very glad if I could think that, but it is impossible. And as for freedom of speaking—oh, yes, you can speak freely, comfortably, if you are going about the country, and meeting strangers, and

talking to anyone, and not caring whether you mistake or not; but it is different when you are in a room with very polite English ladies who are strangers to you—and you are introduced—and you do not know how to say those little sentences that are proper to the time. That is very difficult—very annoying. But it is very surprising the number of your English ladies who have learned German at school; while the French ladies, they know nothing of that, or of anything that is outside Paris. I do think them the most useless of women—very nice to look at, and very charming in their ways, perhaps—but not sensible, honest, frank like the English women, and not familiar with the seriousness of the world, and not ready to see the troubles of other people. But your Englishwoman who is very frank to be amused, and can enjoy herself when there is a time for that—who is generous in time of trouble, and is not afraid, and can be firm and active and yet very gentle, and who does not think always of herself, but is ready to help other people, and can look after a house, and manage affairs—that is a better kind of woman, I think—more to be trusted—more of a companion—oh, there is no comparison!"

All this time the Lieutenant was busy stirring up the fire, and placing huge lumps of coal on the top; and he had obviously forgotten that he was saying these things to two Englishwomen. Tita seemed rather amused.

and kept looking at Bell; Bell said nothing, but pretended to be arranging the things on the table. When the Lieutenant came back from the fire, he had apparently forgotten his complimentary speech; and was regarding with some curiosity the mighty dish of ham and eggs that had come in for our supper.

That was a very comfortable and enjoyable repast. When the chill of driving through the fogs of the plain had worn off, we found that it was not so very cold up here on the hill. A very liberal and honest appetite seemed to prevail; and there was a tolerable attack made on the ample display of ham and eggs. As for the beer that our Lieutenant drank, it is not fair to tell stories. He said it was good beer, to begin with. Then he thought it was excellent beer. At length he said he had not tasted better since he left London.

Women get accustomed to many things during the course of a rambling journey like this. You should have seen how naturally Queen Tita brought forth the bézique-cards directly after supper, and how unthinkingly Bell fetched some matches from the mantelpiece and placed them on the table. My Lady had wholly forgotten her ancient horror of cigar smoke—in any case, as she pointed out, it was other people's houses we were poisoning with the odour. As for Bell, she openly declared that she enjoyed the scent of cigars; and that in the open air, on a summer evening, it was as

pleasant to her as the perfume of the wild roses or the campions.

However, there was no bézique. We fell to talking. It became a question as to which could find the freshest phrases and the strongest adjectives to describe his or her belief that this was the only enjoyable fashion of travelling. The abuse that was poured upon trains, stations, railway porters, and the hurry of cabs in the morning, was excessive. Time-tables of all sorts were spoken of with an animosity which was wonderful to observe when it came along with the soft and pleasant undertones of our Bonny Bell's voice. Tita said she should never go abroad any more. The Lieutenant vowed that England was the most delightful country in the world to drive through. The present writer remarked that the Count had much to see yet; whereupon the foolish young man declared he could seek for no pleasanter days than those he had just spent, and wished, with some unnecessary emphasis, that they might go on for ever. At this moment Bell rose and went to the window.

Then we heard an exclamation. Looking round, we found the shutters open, and lo! through the window we could see the white glare of moonlight falling into the empty thoroughfare, and striking on the wall on the other side of the way.

"It cannot be very cold outside," Bell remarks.

"Bell!" cries Queen Tita, "you don't mean to go out at this time of night!"

"Why not, Madame?" says the Lieutenant. "Was it not agreed before we came up the hill? And when could you get a more beautiful night? I am sure it will be more beautiful than the sunrise from the top of the Niessen."

"Oh, if you think so," says my Lady, with a gentle courtesy, "by all means let us go out for a little walk."

That is the way affairs began to be ordered about to suit the fancies of those young nincompoops. What little vestige of authority remained with the eldest of the group was exerted to secure a provision of shawls and rugs. Bell was not loth. She had a very pretty grey shawl. She had also a smart little grey hat, which nd as the hat was trimmed with blue, the grey shawl could not have been a prettier decoration than the blue ribbon of the guitar. Who proposed it I cannot say; but Bell had her guitar with her when we went out into the bright wonder of the moonlight.

Bourton-on-the-Hill was now a mass of glittering silver, and sharp, black shadows. Below us we could see the dark tower of the church, gleaming grey on the one side; then a mass of houses in deep shadow, with a radiance shining from their tiles and slates; then the grey road down the hill, and on one side of it a big wall,

with its flints sparkling. But when we got quite to the summit, and clambered on to a small piece of common where were some felled trees, what words can describe the extraordinary view that lay around us? The village and its small church seemed to be now half-way down the hill; whereas the great plain of the landscape appeared to have risen high up on the eastern horizon, where the almost invisible stars met the dark woods of Oxfordshire. Over this imposing breadth of wood and valley and meadow—with its dark lines of trees, its glimmerings of farm-houses, and winding streams—the flood of moonlight lay so softly that the world itself seemed to have grown clear from underneath. There were none of the wild glares of white surfaces, and the ebony blackness of shadows which threw everything around us into sharp outline; but a far-reaching and mellow glamour that showed us the mists lying along the river-tracks, and only revealed to us the softened outlines and configurations of the land. If there had been a ruddy light in Moreton-in-the-Marsh, we should have seen it; but the distant village seemed dead; and it, as well as all the great tract of wooded country around it, was whitened over by this softened and silent and almost sepulchral radiance that lay somehow between the dark blue vault overhead and the vast plain beneath. It was but a young moon, but the exceeding rarity of the air lent strength to its radiance.

"Does not moonlight give you the impression that you can hear far?" said Bell in a rather low voice, as if the silence and the stars had overawed her. "It is like frost. You fancy you could hear bells ringing a hundred miles across the clear air."

"Mademoiselle, you will let us hear your singing in this stillness?" said the Lieutenant.

"No, I cannot sing now," she said; and the very gentleness of her voice forbade him to ask again.

We passed along the road. The night air was sweet with the odour of flowers. Out in the west, where the moonlight was less strong, the stars were faintly twinkling. Not a breath of wind stirred; and yet it seemed to us that if a sound had been uttered anywhere in the world, it must have been carried to us on this height. We were as gods up here in the cold sky and the moonlight; and far over the earth, sleep had sealed the lips and the eyes of those poor creatures who had forgotten their sorrows for a time. Should we send them dreams to sweeten their lives by some glimpses of a world different from their own, and cause them to awaken in the morning with some reminiscence of the trance in their softened memories? Or would it not be better to drown them in the fast and hard sleep of fatigue, so that the dawn might bring them a firmer heart and no vanity of wishes? Gods as we were, we had no care for ourselves. It was enough to be.

Could not the night last for ever, and keep us up here near the stars, and give us content and an absolute want of anxiety for the morrow? Queen Titania wandered on as if she were in an enchanted garden, followed by a black shadow on the gleaming white road; and her face, with all its gentleness and delicacy, seemed to have gained something of a pale and wistful tenderness as the white light shone down over the dark woods and crossed our path. As for Bell—but who can describe the grace of the figure that walked before us—the light touching the grey shawl, and the fine masses of brown hair that hung all around the shapely neck and shoulders? We four were in England, sure enough; but it seemed to us then that we were very much alone, and about as near to the starry world as to the definite landscape lying far away on the plain.

We turned, however, when it was found that the road did not lead to any view of the western country. It seemed to run along a high level, cutting through between sand-pits, farms, and woods; and so we made our way back to the bit of common overlooking Bourton, and there we had a few minutes' rest before getting into the small inn, whose windows were gleaming red into the white moonlight.

"Now you must sing to us something, Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant; "and here is a fine big tree cut down, that we can all sit on; and you shall appear as

Apollo in disguise, charming the natives of this landscape with your song."

"But I do not know anything that Apollo sang," said Bell—sitting down, nevertheless, and taking the guitar from her companion.

"That is no matter. You must think yourself some one else—why not Zerlina, in this strange place, and you see Fra Diavolo sitting alone on the rock, and you sing of him, yes? This is a very good place for highwaymen. I have no doubt they have sat here, and watched the gentleman's carriage come up the road beneath; and then, hey! with a rush and a flourish of pistols, and a seizing of the horses, and Madame shrieks in the carriage, and her husband, trembling, but talking very brave, gives up his money, and drives on, with much swearing, but very contented to have no hurt."

"You are very familiar with the ways of highway robbers," said Bell, with a smile.

"Mademoiselle, I am an Uhlan," he replied gravely.

Two at least of the party startled the midnight air with their laughter over this unintentional rebuke; but Bell, conscious of past backslidings, seemed rather discomfited, and hastened to say that she would, if he pleased, sing the song in which Zerlina describes the bandit.

She sang it, too, very charmingly, in that strange silence. Knowing that we could not well see her face,

she lent herself to the character, and we could hear the terror of Zerlina thrilling through her experiences of the dreaded Diavolo. "Diavolo! Diavolo!" the dark woods round us seemed to say. "Diavolo! Diavolo!" throbbed the bass strings of the guitar; and the girl's voice trembled in its low tones as she pronounced the name. If any lonely stranger had been passing along the highway at this hour, what would he have thought of this strange thing,—a beautiful girl seated overhead, amid the stars, apparently, with the moonlight striking on her exquisite face and her masses of hair, while she sang in a low and impassioned voice, and struck chords from some strange instrument? Would she not appear as some wild vision of the Lorelei? Or, considering that companions were visible, and some talking and jesting occasionally heard, might not this be a company of strolling play-actors, such as all honest persons were aforetime conjured to discountenance and suppress?[1]

You know that when Zerlina has sung the first verses of her dramatic song, Diavolo, disguised as a

[1] "All persons concerned are hereby desired to take notice of and suppress all mountebanks, rope-dancers, ballad-singers, &c., that have not a licence from the Master of his Majesty's Revels (which for the present year are all printed with black letters, and the king's arms in red) . . . and all those that have licences with red and black letters, are to come to the office to change them for licences as they are now altered. April 17, 1684."

marquis, suddenly rises and sings the concluding verse himself. Bell accordingly handed the guitar to Count von Rosen, with a pretty smile. But would a young man, on such a night, sing a ballad about a mere bandit? No! The Lieutenant was not averse to act the character of Diavolo, so far as his minstrelsy went, but he adopted one of his gentler moods. Lightly running his fingers over the strings, he began to sing of Agnese la Zitella, and how had he learned to soften his voice so? The pretty Agnes was told that she was as sweet as the Spring, and then she is made to call forth her lover because the night is so fair—so much fairer than the day—and so silent. 'Tis a pleasant barcarole, and conveys a message as well as another. But lest he should be thought too bold, probably, our Uhlan rose abruptly when he had finished the song, and said lightly, with a laugh—

"There! was not that touching enough for Diavolo? He was a very accomplished person, to have all the rough delights of a brigand, and then go about dressed as a marquis, and amuse himself with adventures. I think they treated him badly in the end, if I do remember right."

Bell did not answer. She had got back the guitar. Apparently she was looking far down over the moonlit plain—her eyes grown distant and thoughtful—and as her fingers wandered over the strings, we heard, almost

as in a dream, the various careless notes shape themselves into a melody—a wild, sad melody, that seemed to breathe the tenderness and the melancholy of this still night. "Silent, O Moyle, be the sound of thy waters"—perhaps that was the air; or perhaps it was the heart-breaking "Coolin"—one could scarcely say; but when at last we heard no more of it, Tita rose and said we must go indoors. There was something quite regretful in her tone. It seemed as if she were bidding good-bye to a scene not soon to be met with again.

The Lieutenant gave his hand to Bell, and assisted her down the steep bank into the road; and we passed on until the window of the inn was found glimmering red through the moonlight. We cast a brief glance around. Bourton lay beneath us, asleep. The great landscape beyond remained dark and silent under the luminous whiteness of the air. The silence seemed too sacred to be broken.

"Good night," said Tita to the Lieutenant; "I hope you have spent at least one pleasant evening with us on this journey."

"I have spent many, Madame," he said, earnestly, "and many very pleasant mornings and days, and I hope we shall have a great many more. I do think we four ought to turn vagrants—gipsies, you call them—and go away altogether, and never go back any more to a large town."

"What do you say, Bell?" asked Tita, with a kindly, if half-mischievous, look.

"I suppose we get to Worcester to-morrow," said Bell, with not much appearance of joy in her face; and then she bade good-night to us all, and left with my Lady.

"There it is," said the Lieutenant, with an impatient flinging down of his cap on the table. "That is what interferes with all our pleasure. You go away on the most delightful excursion in the world—you have the most beautiful scenes, and pleasant companions, and freedom—everything you can wish; and then the young lady who ought to be more happy than anyone—who is at the time of life to have no care but to enjoy her prettiness and her good temper, and all that—who is the pleasant ornament of the excursion, and is a great delight to all of us—then she is vexed and frightened because that this—this—this contemptible fellow threatens to meet her in one of those big towns. Sackerrrrr-ment! I do hope he will come and have it over—but if he is annoying—if he troubles her any more——"

Thus do we poor mortals fret and vex ourselves in the midst of our happiest circumstances. But at last there comes a time for sleep. And soon this solitary inn on the hill was as quiet and peaceful as the great world outside, where the moonlight seemed to have hushed the very winds to rest, and where the far woods and the

streams and the low hills along the edge of the land lay still and dark under the cold majesty of the stars.

[*Note by Queen Titania, written at Worcester on the evening of the following day.*—"Any comment of mine on the foregoing is at the moment unnecessary; we have other matters to engage our attention. *Arthur has come.* I can find no words to express the deep and serious annoyance which this escapade is likely to cause. All our plans may be upset; for he can scarcely explain his present wild proceedings without provoking some sort of final agreement with Bell. And suppose she should consent to be engaged to him, how are we to continue our journey? Of course he will not allow her: if he had not disliked it, he would not be here now. Certainly, I *think* Bell has acted imprudently; for I told her that if she did not answer his letter, he would be sure to imagine all manner of things, and come and see her. The consequence is that she is, I fear, in a great dilemma: for I do not see how she can avoid either refusing him altogether, or consenting to *everything* that he asks. And as we can't continue our journey till Monday, he will have a whole day to persecute her into giving him an answer of some kind; and then she is so foolishly good-hearted that, if he is only pathetic enough, she will say 'yes' to *everything*. It is *most provoking*. If we could only get this one day over, and *him back to London!*"]

CHAPTER X.

THE AVENGER.

"Love had ordained that it was Abra's turn
To mix the sweets, and minister the urn."

SURELY nine o'clock was early enough for breakfast at this remote little inn on the top of the hill; and indeed, when we parted the night before, after our moonlight improvisation of *Fra Diavolo*, that was the hour agreed upon. Nine o'clock! Going down at a quarter past eight, with some notion that the Lieutenant might have sat up half the night consuming his wrath in the smoking of many cigars, and might now be still in bed, I heard voices. Sometimes there was a laugh—and no one who had once heard Bell's musical laugh could ever mistake it. When I went into the parlour which had been the Lieutenant's bedroom, I found that all traces of his occupation were gone: a fire was burning brightly in the grate, the breakfast tray was laid, and Bell sat at the open window, talking to Von

Rosen himself, who was standing out on the pavement in the full blaze of the morning sunshine that now filled the main thoroughfare of Bourton-on-the-Hill.

Bell looks round with a startled air.

"My dear," I say to her, "travelling is doing you a world of good. Early rising is an excellent thing for young people."

"I did not know when you might want to start," says Bell, gently, and rather averting her eyes—for which there was no reason whatever.

At this moment Queen Titania came down, looking brisk and cheerful, as she always does in the morning. She glanced at the fire, at the clean table, at Bell sitting by the window, and at the blaze of sunlight on the wall on the other side of the street. Apparently, this pleasant picture put her into an excellent humour, and she said to the Lieutenant, with one of her brightest looks—

"Well, have you been making discoveries this morning? Have you made the acquaintance of many people? Has Bourton-on-the-Hill anything peculiar about it?"

"Oh yes, Madame," said the Lieutenant seriously, "something very singular, which you will not like to hear. This is an English village, in the middle of the country, and yet they never have any milk here—never They cannot get any. The farmers prefer to make butter, and they will not sell milk on any inducement."

"Why," said Tita, "that is the reason of our having

no milk with our tea last evening. But is there no one the landlady can beg a little milk from?"

The Lieutenant looked at Bell, and that young lady endeavoured to conceal a smile. They had evidently been speculating on Tita's dismay before we came down.

"The great farmer in the neighbourhood," continued the Lieutenant, gravely, "is a Mrs. Phillips. I think she owns all the cattle—all the milk. I did send to her a polite message an hour ago, to ask if she would present us with a little of it—but no; there is no answer. At the moment that Mademoiselle came down, I was going up to Mrs. Phillips's farm, to get the milk for you, but Mademoiselle was too proud for that, and would not allow me to go, and said she would not take it now, since the woman had refused it."

"And how did you propose to overcome Mrs. Phillips's obstinacy?" asked Tita, who seemed possessed by a fear that sooner or later the predatory instincts of this Uhlan would get us into trouble.

"Oh, I do not know, but I should have got it some way," said the Lieutenant; and with that he held out a small book he had in his hand. "See! I have made more discoveries this morning. Here is a note-book I have found, of a young lady at school, who has been staying, perhaps, at this house; and it has given me much amusement—oh, very much amusement, and instruction also. It is just the same as if I had been in

the school with her, and she has told me all about her teachers, and the other girls, and all that. Shall I read some to you?"

"Now, *is* it fair," said Bell, "to peep into a young lady's secrets like that?"

"But I have done so already," replied Von Rosen, coolly. "I have read it all—and now I will tell you some of it. First, there are addresses of friends—that is nothing. Then there are stitches of knitting—that is nothing, only the young lady seems correct and methodist—no, methodical, I should say. Then there are notes of lectures, and very much good information in them, oh, very good indeed—I am not surprised your English young ladies know very much. Let me see: '*Epic poetry we like, because they treat of great men and great actions. "Paradise Lost" admired for its noble language. Milton a Puritan. England receives solidity of character from the Puritans. Dryden and Byron are not read, although very great. Byron hated his own race —is not a good poet to read.*' This is very good instruction; but she hastens now to put down something about two other girls, who were perhaps at the lecture. She says: '*Shocking, impertinent, ill-bred creatures; my spirit recoils from them.*' Then there is a question addressed to her neighbour: '*Do you see how Miss Williams has got her hair done?*'"

Here Queen Titania protested against these revela-

tions, and would have held out her hand for the book; but the Lieutenant only stepped back a few inches from the window, and said, seriously—

"There is much better information to come. Here she puts down in order the phrases which one of the masters has used to her class: polite phrases, she says, to use to ladies. 1. *You degrade yourselves.* 2. *How much more kitchen-maidism?* 3. *Simply offensive.* 4. *It shows how you have been brought up.* 5. *I will put a stop to this impertinence.* 6. *Silence, ladies!* 7. *Pretty conduct!* I am afraid he has had an unruly class. Then the young lady has a little piece of composition which I think is the beginning of a novel. She says: '*The summit of Camberwell Grove, which forms part of the lordly elevation known as Denmark Hill, is one of the most charming and secluded retreats around the great metropolis. Here, in the spring-time, groves of lindens put forth their joyous leaves, and birds of various colours flit through the branches, singing hymns of praise. On the one side, the dreary city dwells behind an enchanted veil of trees; on the other, you pass into emerald fields, which stretch onwards to the Arabian magnificence of the Crystal Palace. In this lofty and picturesque spot, Lord Arthur Beauregard was accustomed to pace, musing on the mystery and gloom which had enveloped him since he left the cradle.*' There is no more of this very good story, but on the next page there is a curious thing;

there are three lines all surrounded by a scroll, and do you know what is written?—'*A Woman can do* ANYTHING *with a man by not contradicting him;*' and underneath the scroll is written, '*Don't I wish this was true? Helen M*——.' None of the rest is written so clearly as this——"

"Count von Rosen, I will *not* listen to any more!" cried Tita. "It is most unfair of you to have been reading this young lady's confessions——"

"I get them in a public inn: I have the right, have I not?" remonstrated the Lieutenant. "It is not for pleasure—it is for my instruction that I read. Oh, there are very strange things in this book."

"Pray give it to me," said Bell, quite gently.

He had refused to surrender it to my Lady; but the moment that Bell asked for it, he came forward and handed it in through the window. Then he came in to breakfast.

Little time was spent at breakfast; the sun was shining too brightly outside. We called for our bill, which was brought in. It was entitled "Bill of Fare." Our dinner of the previous evening was called tea, and charged at the rate of one shilling a head. Our breakfasts were one shilling each. Our bedrooms were one shilling each. Any traveller, therefore, who proposes to stay at Bourton-on-the-Hill, cannot do better than put up at the inn of W. Seth Dyde, especially

as there is no other; and I heartily wish that he may enjoy something of the pleasant companionship, the moonlight, and the morning freshness that graced our sojourn on the top of this Worcestershire hill.

Then into the phaeton again, and away we go through the white sunlight and the light morning breeze that is blowing about these lofty woods! There is a resinous odour in the air, coming from the furze and the ferns. The road glares in the sunlight. Overhead the still blue is scarcely flecked by a cloud; but all the same there is a prevailing coolness that makes the driving through the morning air delicious. It is a lonely country—this stretch of forest and field on the high level between Bourton and Broadway. We pass Bourton Clump, and leave Bourton Wood on the right. We skirt Upton Wold, and get on by Furze Heath. Then, all at once, the land in front of us seems to drop down; we come in sight of an immense stretch of blue plain, from which the thin mists of the morning have not wholly risen. We are on the top of the famous Broadway Hill.

By the side of the road there is a strange, old-fashioned little building, which is apparently a wayside chapel. Count von Rosen jumps down to have a look at this odd relic of our former Catholicism, which has remained on the summit of this hill for several centuries. He can discover nothing but a sign which tells that this sacred edifice now contains wines, spirits, and beer; so he

comes back, and goes up to the corner of a field opposite, where a middle-aged man, surrounded by some young folks, is making hay. In the utter stillness of the place, we can hear all the questions and answers. The small building is not so very old; it never was a church. The stones there mark the boundary between Gloucester and Worcester. The view from this place is considered unrivalled for extent; you can see the Black Sandy Mountains on a very clear day.

"Indeed!" says the Count. "Where are they, the mountains you speak of?"

"I don' knaw, sir—I've heerd tell on 'em—I never wur theear."

Going down this steep hill Tita looks anxious. A bad stumble, and we should go rolling over the little wall into the ravine beneath. One has a far-off reminiscence of Switzerland in watching the horses hanging back from the pole in this fashion, while every bend of the road seems more precipitous than its predecessor. Then we get down to the plain, rattle through the level and straggling village of Broadway, and drive into the fields again, where the sun is lying warmer than it was up over the top of the hill.

There is a small boy in a smockfrock sitting underneath the hedge, whittling a stick, while a shepherd's dog lies on the grass beside him.

"Evesham?" calls out the Count, as we pass,

merely because there has been a little doubt about the road.

"Naw, zir," was the answer, uttered with a fine *sang-froid.*

Of course we pull up directly.

"Isn't this the way to Evesham?" I ask.

"Yaas, zir," said the boy, coolly looking up from his stick, but sitting still.

"This is the way to Evesham?"

"Yaas, zir."

"Do you know where it is?"

"Naw, zir."

"He is a very cautious boy," says the Lieutenant, as we drive on; "a very cautious boy indeed."

"If he had been asked properly at first," says Bell, with great gravity, "he would have given a proper answer. But when you say, 'Evesham?' of course the boy tells you this is not Evesham."

Evesham, when we did get to it, was found to be a very bright, clean, and lively little town, with the river Avon, slowly gliding through flat meadows, forming a sort of loop around it. In the quaint streets a good amount of business seemed to be going on; and as we put up at the Crown, and went off for a brief ramble through the place, we found quite an air of fashion in the costume of the young ladies and the young gentlemen whom we met. But the latter, although they had

copied very accurately the Prince of Wales's dress of the previous year, and had very stiff collars and prominent canes, had an odd look of robust health in their cheeks, which showed they were not familiar with Piccadilly and the Park; while the former, although they were very pretty and very neatly attired, ought not to have turned and pretended to look into the shop-windows in order to have a look at Bell's pretty grey dress and hat, and at Queen Titania's more severe but no less graceful costume. But Evesham does not often entertain two angels unawares; and some little curiosity on the part of its inhabitants may be forgiven.

The people of Evesham are not much given to boating on the Avon; and so—postponing our usual river excursion until we should reach the Severn—Bell besought us to go into a photographer's establishment, and make experiments with our appearance. The artist in question lived in a wooden house on wheels; and there were specimens of his handiwork nailed up outside. Our entrance apparently surprised the photographer, who seemed a little nervous, and perhaps was a trifle afraid that we should smile at his efforts in art. But surely nothing could be more kindly than Bell's suggestions to him and her conversation with him; for she, as a "professional" herself, conducted the negotiations and arranged the groups. The artist, charmed to see that she knew all about his occult processes, and that she

was withal a very courteous and kindly visitor, became almost too confidential with her, and began to talk to her of us three as if we were but blocks of wood and of stone to be played with as these two *savants* chose. Of the result of the various combinations into which we were thus forced, little need be said. Queen Titania came out very well; her pale, dark, clear-cut face telling in every picture, and even making us forget the tawdry bit of brass and the purple velvet of the frame. As for the rest of us, a journey is not a good time to have one's portrait taken. The flush of healthy colour produced by the wind, and by much burning of the sun, may look very well on the natural face, but is apt to produce a different effect on glass.

The Lieutenant, for example, roared with laughter when he saw himself transfigured into a ferocious bandit, with a great black beard, a dark face, and two white holes where his eyes should have been. But the moment he had laughed out, he caught sight of Bell's face. The young lady looked very much vexed, and her eyes were cast down. Instantly the young man said, loud enough for the photographer to hear—

"I do seem to myself very ridiculous in this English costume. When you are used to uniforms for a very long time, and all at once get into this common dress, you think yourself some other person, and you cannot help laughing at the appearance yourself makes."

Bell's eyes said "Thank you" as plainly as eyes could speak; and then she paid a very grave and gentle compliment to the artist, whom we left beaming over with pride and gratitude towards the young lady.

"To go flirting with a travelling photographer!" says Queen Tita, as we go in to luncheon: "for shame, Bell!"

"No, it was only Mademoiselle's good nature to the poor man," replies the Lieutenant, with an unnecessary tone of earnest protest. "I do think he is the very happiest person in Evesham to-day—that he has not been so happy for many a day."

"I think the portraits are very good," says Bell, bravely, "if you consider how he has to work."

"Now you know you can't excuse yourself, Bell," says my Lady. "You paid him compliments that would have turned any man's head; and as for the truth of them—or rather the unblushing perversion of truth in them——"

But at this moment Tita happened to be passing Bell's chair, and she put her hand very gently on the young lady's head, and patted her cheek—a little caressing action which said more than a thousand protestations of affection.

Our setting out for Worcester was rather a dismal business. Were we school-children who had been playing truant, that we should regard with appre-

hension a return to town? Or were Bell's vague fears contagious? In vain the Lieutenant sought to cheer her. She knew, and we all of us knew, that if Arthur Ashburton chose to come and ask to see her, nothing could be easier than for him to discover our whereabouts. He was aware of our route, and had been told the names of the principal towns at which we should stop. A party of four arriving from London in a phaeton is not a customary occurrence, and a brief inquiry at the chief hotels in any town would be likely to give him all the information he required.

Then, as we afterwards discovered, Bell had returned no answer to the letter he had sent to Oxford. She had been too much hurt, and had forborne to reply in kind. Who does not know the distracting doubts and fears that an unanswered letter—when one is at a certain age in life—may conjure up, and the terrible suspense that may prompt to the wildest action? We seemed to share in Bell's dismay. The Lieutenant, however, was light-hearted enough, and, as he relinquished his attempts to break the silence, he sent the horses on at a good pace, and hummed to himself broken snatches of a ballad, and talked caressingly to Castor and Pollux.

When we were a few miles from Evesham, without having seen anywhere a glimpse of the obelisk that stands on the famous Evesham plain, it occurred to

us that we might as well ask if we were on the proper road. There seemed a curious quietness and picturesqueness about the wooded lanes through which we were driving in the calm of the twilight. At length we reached a turnpike at the corner of several unfrequented paths, and here an old lady was contentedly sewing, while her assistant, a pretty little girl of thirteen, collected the sixpences. Well, we had only come about five miles out of our route. Instead of going by Pershore, we had struck away northward, and were now in a labyrinth of country lanes, by any of which we might make our way along through the still landscape to Worcester. Indeed, we had no cause to regret this error. The out-of-the-way road that runs by Flyford Flavell and Broughton Hackett proved to be one of the pleasantest we had traversed. In the clear twilight we found ourselves driving through a silent and picturesque district, the only life visible in which was the abundant game. The partridges that were dusting themselves in the road before us, did not get up and disappear with a strong, level, low flight towards some distant field, but walked sedately into the grass by the roadside, and then passed through the hedge. We saw several pheasants calmly standing at the outskirts of the woods. The plump little rabbits ran about like mice around the fences. The sound of the phaeton wheels

was the only noise heard in this peaceful solitude; and as we drove on, the dusk grew apace, and the movements of bird and beast were no longer visible.

Then a new twilight arose—a faint, clear light shining up from below the horizon, and we knew that the moon would speedily be glimmering through the black branches of the woods. The hamlets we passed showed streaks of red within their windows. There were glowworms in the road—points of blue fire in the vague darkness. Then we drove into the gloom of the avenues of Spetchley Park; and finally, with still another glare appearing in the sky—this time a ruddy hue like the reflection of a great fire—we got nearer and nearer to the busy town, and at last heard the horses' feet clattering on a stone street.

The thoroughfares of Worcester were busy on this Saturday night; but at length we managed to make our way through the people and vehicles up to the Star Hotel. We drove into the spacious archway, and passed into the hall, while the people were bringing in our luggage. The Lieutenant was, as usual, busy in giving orders about everything, when the head waiter came up and begged to know my name. Then he presented a card.

"The gentleman is staying at the 'Crown.' Shall I send him a message, sir?"

"No," says Tita, interposing; "I will write a note and ask him to come round to dinner—or supper, whichever it ought to be called."

"Oh, has Arthur come?" says Bell, quite calmly.

"So it appears, my dear," says Queen Titania; and as she utters the words, she finds that Von Rosen has come up and has heard.

"All right," he says cheerfully. "It will be a pleasure to have a visitor at dinner, Madame, will it not? It is a pity we cannot take him further with us when we start on Monday; but I suppose he has come on business to Worcester?"

The Lieutenant took the matter very coolly. He handed Bell and Tita upstairs to look after the disposal of their effects; and then came into the dining-room to see what arrangements had been made about dinner.

"If he behaves himself, that is very well and good. You must treat him civilly. But if not—if he is foolish and disagreeable, why——"

The Lieutenant did not say what would happen then. He bethought himself of the horses, and strode away down into the darkness of the yard, humming lightly, "Mädele, ruck, ruck, ruck, an meine grüne Seite!" He was evidently in no warlike mood.

CHAPTER XI.

SOME WORCESTER SAUCE.

"Faire Emmeline scant had ridden a mile,
A mile forth of the towne,
When she was aware of her father's men
Come galloping over the downe:

"And foremost came the carlish knight,
Sir John of the north countraye;
'Nowe stop, nowe stop, thou false traitoure,
Nor carrye that ladye awaye!'"

"My dear," I say to Queen Titania, as she is fastening a rose in her hair before going down to dinner, "pray remember that Arthur Ashburton is 'also a vertebrate animal.' He has done nothing monstrous or inhuman in paying you a visit."

"Paying me a visit?" says Tita, impatiently. "If he had come to see me, I should not care. But you know that he has come to pick a quarrel with Bell; and that she is likely to grant him everything he asks; and, if she does not, there will be infinite trouble and vexation.

I consider it most provoking—and most thoughtless and inconsiderate on his part—to thrust himself upon us in this way."

"And yet, after all," I say, as she fastens on a bracelet which was given her nearly twenty years ago now, "is there anything more natural? A young man is in love with a young woman——"

"It is his own fault," she interposes.

"Perhaps. So much the worse. He ought all the more to have your compassion, instead of your indignant scorn. Well, she leaves his charming society to go off on a wild rampage through the country. A possible rival accompanies her. The young man is torn asunder with doubts and fears. He writes to her. She does not answer. His anxiety becomes a madness; and forthwith he sets off in pursuit of her. Is there anything in all this to brand him as an outcast from humanity?"

"Why, look at the folly of it! If the girl had proper spirit, would it not drive her into refusing him altogether?"

"Foolish, my dear, yes! but not criminal. Now the whole of you seem to look on Arthur as a monster of wickedness, because he is anxious to marry the girl he is fond of."

My Lady alters the disposition of the thin tracery of silver cord which runs through the dark masses of her

hair, and as she thus manages to shelve the subject, she says—

"I suppose we shall have a pleasant time at dinner. Arthur will be fiercely amusing. Plenty of sarcasm going about. Deadly looks of hatred. Jokes as heavy as that one Bell talks of—that was carried to the window by four men, and killed a policeman when it tumbled over."

My Lady is gently reminded that this story was told of a German, before the date of Bell's conversion; whereupon she answers coolly—

"Oh, I do not suppose that Count von Rosen is like all Germans. I think he is quite an exception—a very creditable exception. I know I have never met anyone the least like him before."

"But heroes were not common in your county, were they?"

"They were in yours," says Tita, putting her arm within mine, and speaking with the most gracious sweetness; "and that was why they took no notice of you."

We go downstairs. At the head of the large dining-room, in front of the fireplace, a young man is standing. He has a time-table in his hand, which he is pretending to read, and his hat is on his head. He hastily removes that most important part of an Englishman's attire, when my Lady enters the room, and then he comes forward with a certain apprehension and embarrassed

look on his face. If he had been growing nervous about his reception, there was nothing, at all events, to be feared from Queen Titania, who would have welcomed the * * * himself with an effusive courtesy, if only she had regarded it as her duty.

"Oh, Arthur," she says, her whole face lighting up with a gladness which amazed even me, who am accustomed to watch her ways, "I am really delighted to see you. How good of you to come and spend the evening with us on so short a notice. I hope we have not taken you away from any other engagement?"

"No," says the young man, apparently very much touched by this kindness, "and—and—it is I who ought to apologize for breaking in on you like this."

"Then you will spend to-morrow with us also?" says my Lady, quite pleasantly. Indeed, there is nothing like facing the inevitable with a good grace.

"Yes," says Arthur, rather humbly, "if you think I'm not intruding."

"Why, your coming will be quite a relief. I should never have forgiven you if you had been in our neighbourhood without coming to see us."

You might think that this little speech was of the nature of a fib. But it was not, just at that moment. When people are absent, Tita is about as cool, and accurate, and severe in her judgment of them as any

woman can be; and she is not disinclined to state her opinion. But once they come near her—and especially if she has to play the part of hostess, and entertain them—the natural and excessive kindness of the woman drives her into the most curious freaks of unconscious hypocrisy. Half an hour before she had been talking of Arthur in a way that would have considerably astonished that young man, if he had known; and had been looking forward with dismay and vexation to all the embarrassments of his visit. Now, however, that he was there—thrown on her mercy as it were—she showed him a quite inordinate kindness, and that in the most honest way in the world. A couple of minutes sufficed to convince Arthur that he had at least one firm friend in our household.

He began to look anxiously towards the door. Presently, a voice that he knew pretty well was heard outside; and then—ominous conjunction!—the Lieutenant and Bell entered together. Von Rosen had held the door open for his companion, so that Bell advanced first towards our visitor. Her face was quite calm and a trifle reserved; and yet every one could see that as she shook hands with the young man, there was a timid, half-concealed look of pleasure and welcome in her eyes. He, on his part, was gloomily ceremonious. He scarcely took any notice of the greeting which the Lieutenant carelessly addressed to

him. He accompanied us over to the table, and took a seat on the right hand of Tita, with a silence that portended evil. We were likely to have a pleasant evening.

Had he possessed a little more worldly prudence or *savoir faire*, he would now have made some light excuse for his being present. He ought, for form's sake, to have given us to understand that, as he was obliged to be in Oxford, he had come on by rail to pay us a visit. But as it was, no explanation was forthcoming. Our Apemantus had apparently dropped from the skies He looked very uncomfortable; and replied in monosyllables to the various and continuous remarks tha Tita addressed to him. He had never spoken to Bell, who sat next him, and who was herself silent. Indeed, the constraint and embarrassment from which she was suffering began to vex the Lieutenant, who strove in vain to conquer it by every means in his power.

The barometer steadily fell. The atmosphere grew more and more gloomy, until a storm of some sort was inevitable. The anxious efforts of Queen Tita to introduce some cheerfulness were touching to see; and, as for Bell, she joined in the talk about our journey, and what we had seen, in a series of disconnected observations that were uttered in a low and timid tone, as if she were afraid to draw down lightning from the thunder-clouds. Lieutenant von Rosen had at first

addressed a word or two to our guest; but finding the labour not productive, he had dropped him entirely out of the conversation. Meanwhile Arthur had drunk a glass or two of sherry. He was evidently nettled at finding the Lieutenant almost monopolizing attention; for Tita herself had given up in despair, and was content to listen. Von Rosen was speaking as usual of the differences between English and German ways, and social aims, and what not, until at last he drifted into some mention of the Republican phenomena that had recently been manifested in this country.

Now what conceivable connection is there between the irritation of an anxious lover and Republicanism? Master Arthur had never alarmed any of us by professing wild opinions on that subject or on any other. We never knew that the young man had any political views, beyond a sort of nebulous faith in the Crown and the Constitution. Consider, therefore, our amazement when, at this moment, he boldly and somewhat scornfully announced himself a Democrat, and informed us that the time was come for dismissing old superstitions and destroying the last monopolies of feudalism. There would be a heavy account to settle with the aristocracy that had for generations made laws to secure its own interests, and tied up the land of the country so that an idle population had to drift into the big towns and become paupers. All this was over. New

times were at hand. England was ripe for a new revolution; and woe to them that tried to stem the tide!

The explanation of which outburst was merely this—that Arthur was so angry and impatient with the state of things immediately around him, that he was possessed with a wild desire to upset and destroy something. And there is nothing so easy to upset and destroy, in rhetoric, as the present political basis of this country.

Well, we looked at the lad. His face was still aglow; and there was something of triumph as well as of fierceness in it. The hero of the old Silesian song, when his sweetheart has forgotten the vows she made, and the ring she gave him is broken in two, would like to rush away into battle, and sleep by camp-fires, under the still night. But nothing half so ordinary would do for our fire-eater, who, because he could not very well kill a Prussian lieutenant, must needs attack the British Crown. Was there any one of us four inclined to resent this burst of sham heroics? Was there not in it something of the desperation of wretchedness that was far more entitled to awaken compassion? Had Arthur been less in love, he would have been more prudent. Had he controlled his emotions in that admirable fashion with which most of our young gentlemen now-a-days seem to set about the business of choosing a wife, he would not have made himself

absurd. There was something almost pitiable in this wild, incoherent, ridiculous effort of a young man to do or say something striking and picturesque before the eyes of a girl whose affections he feared were drifting away from him.

The Lieutenant, to whom this outbreak was particularly addressed, took the affair very good-naturedly. He said, with a smile—

"Do you know who will be the most disappointed, if you should have a Republic in England? Why, the Republicans that are very anxious for it just now. Perhaps some of them are very respectable men—yes, I believe that; but if I am not wrong, the men who make the great fuss about it in your nation are not like that. Agitators—is not that what you call them? And, if you have England a Republic, do you think the government of the country will be given to those noisy persons of the present? No—that is not possible, I think. When the Republic comes, if it does come at all—and I do not know how much force is in this demonstration—all your great men, your well-educated men, your men of good position and good breeding and good feeling—they will all come forward, as they do now, to see that the country is properly governed. And what will become of the present Republicans, who are angry because they cannot get into Parliament, and who wish for a change that they may become great persons?

When you take away the Crown, they will not all be kings, I think: there is too much of good sense in this country, and of public spirit, that makes your best men give up their own comfort to look after the government—and so it will be then."

"I hope there will be no violent change in our time, at least," said Queen Tita.

"Madame is anxious about the Church, I know," remarked the Lieutenant, with great gravity; but he looked at Bell, and Bell could not altogether conceal a smile. Arthur, watching them both, noticed that little bit of private understanding; and the gloom on his face visibly deepened.

This must be said, however, that when an embarrassing evening is unavoidable, a dinner is the best method of tiding it over. The various small incidents of the feast supply any ominous gaps in the conversation; and there is, besides, a thawing influence in good meat and drink which the fiercest of tempers finds it hard to withstand. After the ebullition about Republicanism, Arthur had quieted somewhat. By the time we had got down to the sweets, and perhaps with the aid of a little champagne—the lad never drank much at any time, I ought to say—his anger had become modified into a morose and sentimental melancholy; and when he did manage to speak to Bell, he addressed her in a wistful and pathetic manner,

as if she were some one on board a vessel and he saw her gradually going away from him, her friends, and her native land. One little revelation, nevertheless, comforted him greatly; and lovers apt to magnify their misfortunes will note that he might have enjoyed this solace long before if only he had exercised the most ordinary frankness.

"You got a letter I sent you to Oxford, I suppose?" he said, with a studied carelessness.

"Yes," said Bell, with a little conscious colour in her face, as she bent down her eyes.

"I am glad I had the chance of seeing you to-night," he continued, with the same effort at self-possession, "because I—I fancied you might be unwell—or some accident happened—since you did not send the telegram I begged of you."

Here an awful moment of silence intervened. Everybody trembled for Bell's reply, which might provoke the catastrophe we had been seeking to postpone.

"It was only yesterday forenoon I got your letter," Bell says, apparently feeling the silence uncomfortable; "and—and I meant to have answered it to-night ——"

"Oh, you were going to answer it?" he says, with his face suddenly getting bright.

"Yes," she says, looking up with some surprise. "You did not suppose I wouldn't answer it?"

In fact, that was just what he had supposed, con-

sidering that she had been grievously offended by the tone of his letter.

"I meant to have let you know how we all were, and how far we had got," says Bell, conveying an intimation that this sort of letter might be sent by anybody to anybody.

Nevertheless, Arthur greatly recovered himself after this assurance. She had not broken off with him, after all. He explained that the letter must have been delayed on the way, or she would have got it the day before. He drank another glass of champagne, and said, with a laugh, that he had meditated surprising us, but that the design had failed, for everyone seemed to have expected him.

"I only came down this afternoon; and I suppose I must go back on Monday," he remarked, ruefully.

This looked so very like a request for an invitation that I was bound to offer him a seat in the phaeton, if he did not mind a little discomfort. You should have seen the look of amazement and indignation which my Lady darted across the table at this moment. Fortunately, Arthur did not notice it. He said he was very much obliged—he feared he would have to return—if he went with us for a day or two, he would inconvenience us sadly—but he would consider it before Monday morning.

After dinner, Von Rosen got up and proposed that he

and I should go down to the billiard-room—which is in the end of the building abutting on the stable-yard—and smoke a cigar. Surely generosity could go no further. Arthur looked surprised; and wore quite a pleasant smile on his face when we rose and left.

But perhaps it was merely selfishness that caused our Uhlan to leave the field; for as we two went down the passage, and made our way up to the spacious room, he said—

"I am rather sorry for Mademoiselle. She does not seem to be very glad to meet her old friend—perhaps because he is not in a good temper. That is why I did say we should go and play billiards—there will be a chance of an explanation—and to-morrow he will be all right. It is foolish of him to be disagreeable. All this time of dinner, I was thinking to myself how well he might make himself agreeable if he only wished—with knowing all the polite phrases with ease, and being able to talk without thinking. For me, that is different, you know. I am bound in by stupid limits; and when I think to say something nice to anyone—then I stop because I know nothing of the words—just like at a wall."

He sent the red ball up and down the table in rather a peevish manner; he felt that Arthur had an advantage, perhaps.

"But you talk English remarkably well."

"But I have remarked that you English always say that to a foreigner, and will not tell him when he is wrong. I know I am often wrong—and always about your past tenses—your '*was loving*' and '*did love*,' and '*loved*' and like that; and I believe I am very wrong with always saying '*do*' and '*did*,' for I studied to give myself free speaking English many years ago, and the book I studied with was 'Pepys' Diary,' because it is all written in the first person, and by a man of good station. Now I find you do not say '*I did think*,' but '*I thought*,' only it is very hard to remember. And as for pronunciation, I know I am very wrong."

Well, he had certainly marked forms of pronunciation, which I have considered it unnecessary to reproduce in recording his talk. He said '*I hef*' for '*I have*,' and '*a goot shawt*' for '*a good shot*.' He also made occasional blunders in accent, through adopting the accent of the Latin word from which the English word is derived. But what were such trifles to the main fact that he could make himself understood?

"But this is very strange," he said; "how much more clearly Mademoiselle speaks than any English lady, or any English person I have known yet. It is very remarkable to me, how I have great difficulty to follow people who talk like as if they had several tongues rolling in their mouth—and others speak very fast—and others let the ends of the

words slide away—but Miss Bell, she is always clear, distinct, and very pleasant to hear, and then she never speaks very loud, as most of your people do to a foreigner."

"Perhaps," I say, "there is a reason for Bell's clearness of speech."

"Why?"

"Perhaps she takes pains to be very distinct in talking to you, while she manages not to show it. Perhaps other people can notice that she speaks with a little more deliberation to you than to anyone else."

Von Rosen was obviously much struck.

"Is that possible?" he said, with his eyes full of wonder. "I have not noticed that she did talk slow to me."

"No—she conceals it admirably; but all the same such is the fact. It is not so much slowness as a sort of careful precision of pronunciation that she affects—and you ought to be very grateful for such consideration."

"Oh, I think it is very good of her—very good indeed—and I would thank her for it——"

"Don't do that, or you will have no more of it. And at present my Lady is catching up a trick of talking in the same way."

"It is very kind," said the Lieutenant, turning to the table with rather a thoughtful manner. "You would

not have expected a young girl like that to be so reflective of other people."

Then he broke the balls; and by fair strength of arm screwed the white into the corner pocket. Nobody was more astonished than himself, except the marker. It was, indeed, the first losing hazard he had ever made; he never having played before on a table with pockets. His next stroke was not so successful; and so he consoled himself with lighting a Partaga about eight inches in length.

"At all events," he continued, "your language has not the difference of '*Sie*' and '*du*,' which is a great advantage. Oh, it is a very perplexing thing sometimes. Suppose you do know a young lady very well, and you have agreed with her in private you shall always call each other '*du*;' and then before other people you call her '*Sie*'—it is very hard not to call her '*du*,' by mistake, and then everyone jumps up, and stares at you, and all the secret is known. That is a very terrible thing."

"And please what is the interesting ceremony with which you drink *brüderschaft* with a young lady? The same as usual?—a large jug of beer—your arms intertwined——"

"No—no—no!" he cried. "It is all a mystery. You shall not know anything of that. But it is very good—it is a very pleasant thing—to have *brüderschaft* with

a young lady—although you drink no beer, and have no ceremonies about it."

"And what did Fräulein Fallersleben's mamma say when you called her daughter '*du*' by mistake?"

The large empty room resounded with the Lieutenant's laughter.

"That is a good guess—oh! a very good guess—but not just good enough. For it was she who did call me '*du;*' and all the people were surprised—and then some did laugh—but she herself—oh! she was very angry with herself, and with me too, and for some time she called me '*Sie*' even when we were together, until it was likely to be a quarrel. But one more quarrel," added the Lieutenant, with indifference, "was not much matter. It was usually one every day—and then writing of sorrowful letters at the night—and next morning some reconciliation——*Sackerment!* what is the use of talking of all that nonsense?"

And then once more the ball flew about the table; finally lodging in a pocket, and scoring three for a miss. Indeed, our Uhlan was not at home with our big English tables, their small balls, pointed cues, and perpetual pockets. Even when he got a good chance of a cannon, the smallness of the balls caused him to fail entirely. But he had a very excellent cigar. It was something to be away from the embarrassment that had prevailed at dinner. Perhaps, too, he enjoyed

a certain sense of austere self-satisfaction in having left to Arthur full possession of the field. On the whole he enjoyed himself very well; and then, our cigars being finished, we had a final look at the horses, and then returned to the coffee-room.

"I am afraid," said Von Rosen, with some alarm, "we have been negligent of our duties."

Master Arthur had left some half-hour before. The ladies had retired. Only one or two of the heaviest topers were left in the bar-parlour; the waiters looked as if they considered their week's work fairly over.

"Tell me," said my Prussian friend, as he got his candle, "is that young gentleman coming round here to-morrow?"

"Probably he is."

"Do you not think, then, it would be good to hire a vehicle and go away somewhere for a drive all the day before he comes?"

"To-morrow is Sunday."

"Well?"

"Do you fancy you would get either Bell or my Lady to go driving on Sunday? Don't you propose such a thing, if you are wise. There is a Cathedral in this town; and the best thing you can do is to study its history and associations early in the morning. You will have plenty of time to think over them to-morrow, inside the building itself."

"Oh, I do not object to that," he remarked, coolly, as he went upstairs, "and I do not care to have too much driving—it is only to prevent Mademoiselle being annoyed, as I think she was at dinner this evening—that is all. I suppose we may go for a walk to-morrow after the church-time? And he will come? Very well, he will not harm me, I am sure; but—but it is a pity—that is all."

And with this somewhat mysterious conclusion, the Lieutenant disappeared towards his own room.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RIVALS.

"When on the gentle Severn's sedgy bank,
In single opposition, hand to hand,
He did confound the best part of an hour
In changing hardiment with great Glendower."

"If we could only get over this one day,"—that was the burden of Tita's complaining the next morning. Arthur had been invited to breakfast, and had declined; but he was coming round to go with us to the Cathedral. Thereafter, everything to Tita's mind was chaos. She dared hardly think of what the day might bring forth. In vain I pointed out to her that this day was but as another day; and that if any deeds of wrath or vengeance were hidden away in the vague intentions of our young friend from Twickenham, there was no particular safety gained in tiding over a single Sunday.

"At all events," says my Lady, firmly, "you cannot do anything so imprudent as press him to accompany us further on our journey."

"Cannot the phaeton hold five?"

"You know it cannot, comfortably. But that is not the question. For my own part, I don't choose to have a holiday spoilt by provoking a series of painful scenes, which I know will occur. We may manage to humour him to-day, and get him to leave us in an amiable mood; but it would be impossible to do it two days running. And I am not sure even about this one day."

"But what prevents his dropping down on us at any time—say at Shrewsbury—or Chester—or Carlisle—just as he has done here at Worcester?"

"I will."

That was enough. Having some regard for the young man, I hoped he would submit quietly. But lovers are headstrong; and jealousy, when it is thoroughly aroused, leaves no place in the mind for fear.

It was a bright morning. We could see, through the wire screens of the windows, the Worcester folks walking along the pavements with the sunlight shining on their Sunday finery.

The Lieutenant, as we hurriedly despatched breakfast—for we were rather late—gave us his usual report.

"A very fine town," he said, addressing himself chiefly to Tita, who was always much interested in his morning rambles, "with old religious buildings, and houses with ivy, and high walls to keep back the river.

There is a large race-course, too, by the river; and on the other side a fine suburb, built on a high bank, among trees. There are many pleasant walks by the Severn, when you get further down; but I will show you all the place when we go out of the Cathedral. This is a great day at the Cathedral, they say—a Chief Sheriff of the county, I think they call him, is living at this hotel, and he is going; and you see those people? —they are loitering about to see him drive away."

Even as he spoke, two resplendent creatures, in grey and gold, resembling beef-eaters toned down in colour and gilded, advanced to the archway of the hotel, with long trumpets in their hands. These they suddenly lifted, and then down the quiet street sounded a loud *fanfare*, which was very much like those announcements that tell us, in an historical play, that the King approaches. Then a vehicle drove away from the door; the High Sheriff had gone to the Cathedral; while our breakfast was not even yet finished.

"He does not have the trumpets sounded every time he leaves the hotel?" said the Lieutenant, returning from the window. "Then why when he goes to church? Is it exceptional for a High Sheriff to go to church, that he calls attention to it with trumpets?"

At this moment, Arthur entered the room. He glanced at us all rather nervously. There was less complaisance, too, in his manner, than when we last

saw him; the soothing influences of dinner had departed. He saluted us all in a somewhat cool way, and then addressed himself exclusively to my Lady. For Bell he had scarcely a word.

It is hard to say how Queen Tita managed, as we left the hotel, to attach Bell and herself to Master Arthur; but such was the result of her dexterous manœuvres; and in this fashion we hurriedly walked along to the Cathedral. There was a great commotion visible around the splendid building. A considerable crowd had collected to see the High Sheriff; and policemen were keeping a lane for those who wished to enter. Seeing that we were late, and that the High Sheriff was sure to draw many after him, we scarcely expected to get inside; but that, at least, was vouchsafed us, and presently we found ourselves slipping quietly over the stone flooring. All the seats in the body of the building being occupied, we took up a position by one of the great pillars, and there were confronted by a scene sufficiently impressive to those of us who had been accustomed to the ministrations of a small parish church.

Far away before us rose the tall and graceful lines of the architecture, until, in the distance, they were lost in a haze of sunlight streaming in from the south—a glow of golden mist that struck upon the northern pillars, throwing up a vague reflection that showed us some-

thing of the airy region in which the lines of the great arches met. We could catch a glimpse, too, of the white-dressed choir, beyond the sombre mass of the people that filled the nave. And when the hushed, deep tones of the organ prelude had ceased to sound along the lofty aisles, there rose the distant and plaintive chanting of the boys—then the richer tones of the bass came in—and then again burst forth that clear, sweet, triumphant soprano, that seemed to be but a single voice ringing softly and distantly through the great building. I knew what would occur then. Somehow Tita managed to slip away from us, and get into the shadow of the pillar, with her head bent down, and her hand clasped in Bell's; and the girl stood so that no one should see her friend's face, for there were tears running fast down it. It is a sad story, that has been already briefly mentioned in these memoranda. Many years ago she lost a young brother, to whom she was deeply attached. He used to sing in the choir o the village church. Now, whenever she listens to a choir singing that she cannot see, nothing will convince her that she does not hear the voice of her brother in the clear, distant music; and more than once it has happened that the uncontrollable emotions caused by this wild superstition have thoroughly unnerved her. For days after, she has been haunted by the sound of that voice, as if it had brought her a message from the

other world—as if she had been nearly vouchsafed a vision that had been somehow snatched away from her, leaving behind an unexplained longing and unrest. Partly on that account, and partly by reason of the weariness produced by constant standing, we were not sorry to slip out of the Cathedral when the first portion of the service was over; and so we found ourselves once more in the sweet air and the sunlight.

There was an awkward pause. Tita rather fell behind, and endeavoured to keep herself out of sight; while the other members of the party seemed uncertain as to how they should attach themselves. Fortunately, our first movement was to go round and inspect the curious remains of the old Cathedral, which are yet visible; and as these were close at hand, we started off in a promiscuous manner, and got round and under King Edgar's tower without any open rupture.

How still and quiet lay the neighbourhood of the great church on this beautiful Sunday morning! It seemed as if all the life of the place were gathered within that noble building; while out here the winds from over the meadows, and the sunlight, and the fleecy clouds overhead, were left to play about the strange old passages, and sunken arches, and massive gateways, and other relics of former centuries. The bright light that lay warm on the fresh grass, and on the ivied walls about, lit up the flaky red surface of the old tower, and showed

us the bruised effigy of King Edgar in sharp outline; while through the gloom of the archway we could see beyond the shimmering green light of a mass of elms, with their leaves moving in the sun. From thence we passed down to the river wall, where the Lieutenant read aloud the following legend inscribed near the gate:—"On the 18th of November, 1770, the Flood rose to the lower edge of this Brass Plate, being ten inches higher than the Flood which happen'd on December 23, 1672." And then we went through the arch, and found ourselves on the banks of the Severn, with its bridges and boats and locks, and fair green meadows, all as bright and as cheerful as sunlight could make them.

Tita and myself, I know, would at this moment have given a good deal to get away from these young folks and their affairs. What business of ours was it that there should be a "third wheel to the cart," as the Germans say? Arthur was sadly out of place; but how could we help it? My Lady having fallen rather behind as we started on our leisurely stroll along the river, Bell, the Lieutenant, and Arthur were forced to precede us. The poor girl was almost silent between them. Von Rosen was pointing out the various objects along the stream; Arthur, in no amiable mood, throwing in an occasional sarcastic comment. Then more silence. Arthur breaks away from them, and honours

us with his company. Sometimes he listens to what my Lady says to him; but more often he does not, and only scowls at the two young folks in front of us. He makes irrelevant replies. There is a fierceness in his look. I think at this moment he would have been glad to have embraced Mormonism, or avowed his belief in Strauss, or done anything else desperate and wicked.

Why, it was natural to ask, should this gentle little woman by my side be vexed by these evil humours and perversities—her vexation taking the form of a profound compassion, and a desire that she could secure the happiness of everybody? The morning was a miracle of freshness. The banks of the Severn, once you leave Worcester, are singularly beautiful. Before us were islands, set amid tall river weeds, and covered with thick growths of bushes. A grey shimmering of willows came in as a line between the bold blue of the stream and the paler blue and white of the sky. Some tall poplars stood sharp and black against the light green of the meadows behind; and far away these level and sunlit meadows stretched over to Malvern Chase and to the thin line of blue hill along the horizon. Then the various boats—a group of richly-coloured cattle in the fields—a few boys bathing under the shadow of a great bank of yellow sand—all went to make up as bright and pretty a river-picture as one could wish for. And here we were almost afraid to

speak, lest an incautious word should summon up thunder-clouds and provoke an explosion.

"Have you any idea when you will reach Scotland?" says Arthur, still glaring at the Lieutenant and his companion.

"No," replies Tita; "we are in no hurry."

"Won't you get tired of it?"

"I don't think so at all. But if we do, we can stop."

"You will go through the Lake Country, of course?"

"Yes."

"It is sure to be wet there," said the young man.

"You don't give us much encouragement," says my Lady, gently.

"Oh," he replies, "if people break away from the ordinary methods of enjoying a holiday, of course they must take their chance. In Scotland you are sure to have bad weather. It always rains there."

Arthur was determined that we should look upon the future stages of our journey with the most agreeable anticipations.

"Then," he says, "suppose your horses break down?"

"They won't," says Tita, with a smile. "They know they are going to the land of oats. They will be in excellent spirits all the way."

Master Arthur went on to add—

"I have always found that the worst of driving about with people was that it threw you so completely on the

society of certain persons; and you are bound to quarrel with them."

"That has not been *our* experience," says my Lady, with that gracious manner of hers which means much.

Of course she would not admit that her playful skirmishes with the person whom, above all others, she ought to respect, could be regarded as real quarrels. But at this point the Lieutenant lingered for a moment to ask my Lady a question; and as Bell also stopped and turned, Tita says to him, with an air of infinite amusement—

"We have not quarrelled yet, Count von Rosen?"

"I hope not, Madame," says our Uhlan, respectfully.

"Because," she continued, with a little laugh, "Arthur thinks we are sure to disagree, merely on account of our being thrown so much into each other's company."

"I think quite the opposite will be the result of our society," says the Lieutenant.

"Of course I did not refer particularly to you," said Arthur, coldly. "There are some men so happily constituted that it is of no consequence to them how they are regarded by their companions. Of course they are always well satisfied."

"And it is a very good thing to be well satisfied," says the Lieutenant, cheerfully enough, "and much better than to be ill satisfied and of much trouble to

your friends. I think, sir, when you are as old as I, and have been over the world as much, you will think more of the men who are well satisfied."

"I hope my experience of the world," says Arthur, with a certain determination in his tone, "will not be gained by receiving pay to be sent to invade a foreign country——"

"Oh, Count von Rosen," says Bell, to call his attention.

"Mademoiselle!" he says, turning instantly towards her, although he had heard every word of Arthur's speech.

"Can you tell me the German name of that tall pink flower down by the edge of the water?"

And so they walked on once more; and we got further away from the city—with its mass of slates and spires getting faint in the haze of the sunlight — and into the still greenness of the country, where the path by the river-side lay through deep meadows.

It was hard, after all. He had come from London to get speech of his sweetheart, and he found her walking through green meadows with somebody else. No mortal man—and least of all a young fellow not confident of his own position, and inclined to be rather nervous and anxious—could suffer this with equanimity; but then it was a question how far it was his own fault.

"Why don't you go and talk to Bell?" says my Lady to him, in a low voice.

"Oh, I don't care to thrust my society on anyone," he says aloud, with an assumption of indifference. "There are people who do not know the difference between an old friendship and a new acquaintance—I do not seek to interfere with their tastes. But of course there is a meaning in everything. What are those lines of Pope's—

> "'O say, what stranger cause, yet unexplored,
> Could make a gentle belle reject a lord?'

I should not attempt to cure a woman of her instinctive liking for a title."

Tita placed her hand on his arm. After all, this excited young man was an old friend of hers; and it seemed a pity to see him thus determined to ruin his own cause. But the light talking we heard in front seemed to say that the "gentle Belle" had not overheard that pretty speech and its interesting quotation.

At length, coming to a sudden bend in the river, the Lieutenant and his companion proposed that we should rest for a while; and accordingly we chose out comfortable seats on the steep green bank, covered by bushes and trees, which here slopes down to the stream. The picture that lay before and around us was sufficient to have calmed the various moods and

passions of these young folks, if they had but had eyes for anything but their own affairs. Bell was the only one who paid attention to the world of bright colours that lay around. The Lieutenant—imperturbable, easy in manner, and very attentive to her—was nevertheless obviously on the watch, and certain to resent any remark that might by chance miss him and glance by towards her. Certainly, these were not comfortable conditions for a pleasant walk. Tita afterwards declared that she was calculating with satisfaction that she had already got through several hours of that terrible day.

The sun was shining far away on the blue Malvern hills. Along the level meadows the lines of pollard willows were grey and silvery in the breezy light. Close at hand the rich masses of green were broken by the red sandstone bank opposite; while the tall trees above sent straggling duplicates of themselves—coloured in deep chocolate-brown—down into the lazy stream that flowed beneath us. And as we sat there and listened for the first ominous observation of one or another of these young folks, lo! there glided into the clear white and blue channel of the river a gaily-bedizened barge that gleamed and glittered in the sunlight and sent quivering lines of colour down into the water. The horse came slowly along the road. The long rope rustled over the brushwood on the bank, and

splashed on the surface of the stream. The orange and scarlet bands of the barge stole away up and through that world of soft greenness that lay under the shadow of the opposite bank; and then the horse, and rope, and driver turned the corner of a field, and we saw them no more.

The appearance of the barge had provoked attention, and secured silence. When it was gone the Lieutenant turned carelessly to Arthur, and said—

"Do you go back to London to-morrow?"

"I don't know," said the young man, gloomily.

"It is such a pity you can't come with us, Arthur," says Bell, very gently, as if begging for a civil reply.

"I have no doubt you will enjoy yourselves very well," he replies, with a certain coldness in his tone.

"We have hitherto," she says, looking down; "the weather has been so good—and—and the scenery was so pleasant—and—and——"

It was Arthur himself, singularly enough, who came to the rescue, little knowing that he was affording her such relief.

"I don't think you have chosen the right road," he remarked. "The real reminiscences of the old stage-coach days you will find on the York and Berwick road to Scotland. I never heard of anyone going to Scotland this way."

"Why," says one of the party, with a laugh that

seemed to startle the stillness around, "that is the very reason we chose it."

"I have been thinking for some time," he says coldly, "of getting a dog-cart and driving up the old route to Scotland."

The heavens did not fall on him. Queen Tita looked at the tips of her gloves, and said nothing; but Bell, having less of scepticism about her, immediately cried out—

"Oh, Arthur, don't do that; it will be dreadfully wretched for you going away on such an excursion by yourself."

But the young man saw that his proposal—I w swear it had never entered his brain before that very minute—had produced an effect; and treated it as a definite resolve.

"At least, if you are going, you might as well come with us, or meet us further on, where the roads join," says Bell.

"No, I am not so mad as to go your way," he replied, with an air of disdain. "I shall keep out of the rainy districts, and I mean to go where one can find traces of the old times still hanging about."

"And pray," I venture to ask him, "are all the old inns confined to one part of this unfortunate country? And were there no ways of getting to Scotland but by York and Berwick? Why, over the whole country

there is a network of routes along which stage-coaches used to run. And if you should be tired of driving alone, you can do no better than strike across country from York by the old coach-road that comes on to Penrith, and so go up with us through Carlisle and Moffat on to Edinburgh."

"I am not so sure that I shall go alone," he said, quite fiercely.

What did the boy mean? Was he going to drive a white elephant about the country?

"Do you know much of the management of horses?" says the Lieutenant, meaning no harm whatever.

"Arthur is in the volunteer artillery,—the field artillery, do they call it?—and of course he has to manage horses," explains my Lady.

"Oh, you are a volunteer?" said the Lieutenant with quite an accession of interest. "That is a very good thing. I think all the young men of this country would do much good to their health and their knowledge by being volunteers and serving a time of military service."

"But we don't like compulsion here," says Arthur, bluntly.

"That," retorts the Lieutenant, with a laugh, "is why you are at present a very ill-educated country."

"At all events," says Arthur, rather hotly, "we are educated well enough to have thrown aside the old

superstitions of feudalism and divine right; and we are too well educated to suffer a despotic government and a privileged aristocracy to have it all their own way."

"Oh, you do talk of Prussia, yes?" said the Count. "Well, we are not perfect in Prussia. We have many things to learn and to do, that we might have done if we had been preserved round about by the sea, like you. But I think we have done very well for all that: and if we have a despotic government, which I do not think, it is perhaps because what is good for England is not always good for every other country; and if we have an aristocracy, they work for the country just like the sons of the peasants, when they go into the army, and get small pay, instead of going abroad like your aristocracy, and gambling away their fortunes to the Jews and the horse dealers, and getting into debt and making very much fools of themselves."

"When we of this country," says Arthur, proudly, "see the necessity of military preparations, we
ranks of a body that accepts no pay, but is none the less qualified to fight when that is wanted."

"Oh, I do say nothing against your volunteers. No, on the contrary, I think it is an excellent thing for the young men. And it would be better if the service was continuous for one, two, or three years—and they go away into barrack life—and have much

drill and exercise in the open air, and make the young men of the cities hardy and strong. That would be a very good army then, I think; for when the men are intelligent and educated, they have less chance of panic—which is the worst that can happen in a battle—and they will not skulk away, or lose their courage, because they have so much self-respect. But I do not know whether this is safer—to have the more ignorant men of the peasantry and country people who will take their drill like machines and go through it all, and continue firing in great danger, because they are like machines. Now, if you had your towns fighting against the country, and if you had your town volunteers and your country regiments with the same amount of instruction, I think the country troops would win, although each man might not have as much patriotism and education and self-respect as in the town soldiers. Because the country troops would march long distances—and would not be hurt much by rain or the sleeping out at night—and they would go through their duties like machines when the fight commenced. But your city volunteers—they have not yet got anything like the training of your regular troops that come from the country villages and towns."

"I know this," says Arthur, "that if there was to be an invasion of this country by Prussia, a regiment

of our city volunteers would not be afraid to meet a regiment of your professional soldiers, however countrified and mechanical they may be——"

"Ah, but that is a great mistake you make," says the Lieutenant, taking no notice of the challenge; "our soldiers are not of any single class—they are from all classes, from all towns, and villages, and cities alike—much more like your volunteers than your regular soldiers, only that they have some more drill and experience than your volunteers. And what do you say of an invasion? I have heard some people talk of that nonsense—but only in England. Is it that you are afraid of invasion that you imagine these foolish things, and talk so much of it?"

"No, we are not afraid of it——" says Arthur, evidently casting about for some biting epigram.

"Yet no one in all Europe speaks or thinks of such a thing but a few of your people here, who give great amusement to us at home."

"There would be amusement of another sort going," says Arthur, getting a little red.

And just at this instant, before he has time to finish the sentence, Tita utters a little scream. A stone has splashed into the stream beneath us. The author of the menace is unknown—being probably one of a gang of young rascals hidden behind the bushes on the other side of the river—but it is certainly not

anger that dwells in my Lady's bosom with regard to that concealed enemy. He has afforded her relief at a most critical moment; and now she prevents Arthur returning to the subject by proposing that we should walk back to Worcester; her suggestion being fully understood to be a command.

We set out. The Lieutenant wilfully separates himself from Bell. He joins us elderly folks on the pretence of being much interested in this question of Volunteer service—and Bell and Arthur are perforce thrown together. They walk on in front of us, in rather an embarrassed way. Bell's looks are cast down; Arthur speaks in a loud voice, to let us know that he is only talking about the most common-place affairs. But at the first stile we go through, they manage to fall behind; and when, at intervals, we turn to see how the river and the meadows and the groves of trees look in the sunshine, we find the distance between us and the young couple gradually increasing, until they are but two almost undistinguishable figures pacing along the banks of the broad stream.

"Well, we have got so far over the day!" said my Lady, with a sigh. "But I suppose we must ask him to dine with us."

"Is it necessary, Madame?" says the Lieutenant. "But perhaps you might ask him to bring better manners with him."

"I am afraid he has been very rude to you," said Tita, with some show of compunction.

"To me? No. That is not of any consequence whatever, but I did think that all this pleasant walk has been spoiled to Mademoiselle and yourself by —by what shall I say?—not rudeness, but a fear of rudeness. And yet, what reason is there for it?"

"I don't know," was the reply, uttered in rather a low voice. "But I hope Bell is not being annoyed by him now."

You see, that was the way in which they had got to regard this unfortunate youth—as a sort of necessary evil, which was to be accepted with such equanimity as Heaven had granted to the various sufferers. It never occurred to them to look at the matter from Arthur's point of view, or to reflect that there was probably no more wretched creature in the whole of England than he was during this memorable Sunday.

Consider how he spent the day. It was the one day on which he would have the chance of seeing Bell for an unknown period. He comes round in the morning to find her sitting at breakfast with his rival. He accompanies them on a walk into the country; finds himself "the third wheel to the cart," and falls behind to enjoy the spectacle of seeing her walk by the side of this other man, talking to him,

and sharing with him the beautiful sights and sounds around. Ye who have been transfixed by the red-hot skewers of jealousy, think of the torture which this wretched young man suffered on this quiet Sunday morning. Then as he walks home with her, he finds her, as we afterwards learn, annoyed about certain remarks of his. He explains in a somewhat saucy manner, and makes matters worse. Then he takes to reproaches, and bids her reflect on what people will say; and here again he goes from one blunder to another in talking in such a fashion to a proud and high-spirited girl, who cannot suffer herself to be suspected. In his blindness of anger and jealousy, he endeavours to asperse the character of the Lieutenant—he is like other officers—every one knows what the Prussian officers, in general, are—what is the meaning of this thing, and the dark suspicion suggested by that. To all of these representations Bell replies with some little natural warmth. He is driven wild by her defence of his rival. He declares that he knows something about the Lieutenant's reputation—and then she, probably with a little paleness in her face, stands still, and asks him calmly to say what it is. He will not. He is not going to carry tales. Only, when an English lady has so little care of what people may say as to accept this foreign adventurer as her companion during a long journey——

That was all that Bell subsequently told Tita. The boy was obviously mad and reckless, but none the less he had wrought such mischief as he little dreamed of in uttering these wild complaints and suspicions. When we got back to the hotel, he and Bell had overtaken us, and they had the appearance of not being on the best of terms. In fact, they had maintained silence for the last quarter of an hour of the walk.

My Lady asked Arthur to dine with us at seven; so that during the interval he was practically dismissed. Seven came, and Arthur appeared. He was in evening dress; conveying a rebuke to uncouth people like ourselves, who were in our ordinary travelling costume. But Bell's seat was vacant. After we had waited a few minutes, Queen Tita went to inquire for her, and in a few minutes returned.

"Bell is very sorry, but she has a headache, and would rather not come down to dinner."

Arthur looked up with an alarmed face; the Lieutenant scowled; and Tita, taking her seat, said she was afraid we had walked too far in the morning. Strange. If you had seen our Bell walking lightly up to the top of Box-hill and running down again —just by way of amusement before lunch—you would not have expected that a short walk of a mile or two along a level river-course would have

had such an effect. But so it was; and we had dinner before us.

It was not an enlivening meal; and the less said about it the better. Arthur talked much of his driving to Scotland in a dog-cart, and magnified the advantages of the York route over that we were now following. It is quite certain that he had never thought of such a thing before that morning; but the attention that had been drawn to it, and the manner in which he had been led to boast of it, promised actually to commit him to this piece of folly. The mere suggestion of it had occurred at the impulse of a momentary vexation; but the more he talked of it, the more he pledged himself to carry out his preposterous scheme. Tita heard and wondered, scarcely believing; but I could see plainly that the young man was determined to fulfil his promise if only by way of triumphant bravado, to show his independence of us, and perhaps inspire Bell with envy and regret.

When he left that night, something was said about his coming to see us away on the following morning. Tita had shown her usual consideration in not referring at all to our drive of the next day, which she understood was to be through the most charming scenery. And when, that same night, she expressed a vague desire that we might slip away on the next

morning before Arthur had come, it was with no thought of carrying such a plan into execution. Perhaps she thought with some pity of the young man who, after seeing us drive away again into the country, and the sweet air, and the sunlight, would return disconsolately to his dingy rooms in the Temple, there to think of his absent sweetheart, or else to meditate that wild journey along a parallel line which was to show her that he, too, had his enjoyments.

[*Note.*—I find that the remarks which Queen Titania appended to the foregoing pages when they were written, have since been torn off; and I can guess the reason. A few days ago I received a letter, sent under cover to the publishers, which bore the address of that portion of the country familiarly called "the Dukeries." It was written in a feminine hand, and signed with a family name which has some historical pretensions. Now these were the observations which this silly person in high places had to communicate :—"*Sir, I hope you will forgive my intruding myself upon you in this way; but I am anxious to know whether you really do think living with such a woman as your wife is represented to be, is really a matter for* raillery and amusement. *My object in writing to you is to say that, if you can treat lightly the fact of a wife being waspish at every turn, cuffing her boys' ears, and talking of whipping, it would have been better not to have made your* extraordinary *complaisance public; for what is to prevent the most ill-tempered woman pointing to these pages, and saying that that is how a* reasonable *husband would deal with her? If it is your misfortune to have an ill-tempered wife, you ought not to try to persuade people that you are rather proud of it. Pray forgive my writing thus frankly to you; and I am, Sir, your obedient servant,* ——— ———." By a great mischance I left this lying letter open on the breakfast-table; and Tita, coming in, and being attracted by the crest in gold and colours on the paper, took it up. With some dismay, I watched her read it. She let it down—stood irresolute for a moment, with her lips getting rather tremulous—then she suddenly fled into the haven she had often sought

before in her troubles, and looking up with the clear brown eyes showing themselves frightened and pained, like those of some dumb creature struck to the heart, she said, "Is it true? Am I really ill-tempered? Do I really vex you very much?" You may be sure that elderly lady up in Nottinghamshire had an evil quarter of an hour of it when we proceeded to discuss the question, and when Queen Tita had been pacified and reassured. "But we ought to have known," she said. "Count von Rosen warned us that stupid persons would make the mistake. And to say that I cuffed my boys' ears! Why, you know that even in the *Magazine* it says that I cuffed the boys and kissed them at the same time—of course, in fun—and I threatened to whip the whole house—of course, in fun, you know, when everybody was in good spirits about going away—and now that wicked old woman would make me out an unnatural mother, and a bad wife, and I don't know what! I—I—I will get Bell to draw a portrait of her, and put it in an exhibition—that would serve her right." And forthwith she sat down and wrote to the two boys at Twickenham, promising them I know not what luxuries and extravagances when they came home for the Easter holidays. But she is offended with the public, all through that gabbling old lady in Notts; and will have no more communication with it, at least for the present.]

CHAPTER XIII.

SAVED!

"Unto the great Twin Brethren
We keep this solemn feast.
Swift, swift the great Twin Brethren
Came spurring from the east!"

CASTOR and Pollux did us notable service that morning at Worcester. Arthur was coming round to see Bell before we started. Queen Tita was oppressed by anxious fears; and declared that now the great crisis had come, and that the young man from Twickenham would demand some pledge from Bell as he bade her good-bye. The dread of this danger drove the kindly little woman into such exaggerations of his misconduct of yesterday that I began to wonder if this Arthur were really the same lad she used to pet and think so much of when he came down to Leatherhead and dawdled with my Lady and Bell along the Surrey lanes of an evening. What had changed him since then?

"You are pleased to be profound," says Tita, abruptly.

Well, I was only pointing out to her that one of the chief accomplishments of life is consideration for the sick; and that whereas nearly all women seem to have an inherited instinct that way, men only acquire the habit as the result of experience and reflection. Indeed, with most women, the certain passport to their interest and kindliness is to be unwell and exact a great deal of patient service from them. Now—I was saying to Tita, when she uttered that unnecessary rebuke—why don't women show the same consideration to those who are mentally ailing?—to the unfortunate persons whose vexed and irritated brain renders them peevish and ill-tempered? Once get a patient down with fever, and all his fractious complainings are soothed, and all his querulous whims are humoured. But when the same man is rendered a little insane by meeting with a disappointment—or if he is unable to stand being crossed in argument, so that the mildest statement about some such contested subject as the American War, Governor Eyre, or the Annexation of Alsace, sends a flash of flame through his head—why should not the like allowance be made for his infirmities? Why should the man who is ill-tempered because of a fever be humoured, caressed, and coaxed; and the

man who is ill-tempered because his reason is liable to attacks of passion, be regarded as an ill-conditioned boor, not fit for the society of well-bred ladies and gentlemen?

"I think," says Tita, with a little warmth, "you do nothing now but try to invent excuses for Arthur. And it is not fair. I am very sorry for him if he is so vexed that he loses his temper; but that does not excuse his being absolutely rude."

"But his rudeness is part of his ailment," I venture to say. "Ordinarily, he is the mildest and gentlest of young men, who would shrink from a charge of rudeness as the worst thing you could urge against him. At present he is off his head. He does not know what he says—or rather, he is incapable of controlling his utterances. He is really sick with a fever—though it isn't one of those, apparently, that secure the commiseration of even the most angelic of women."

I regarded that last expression as rather effective; but no. My Lady remarked that she was not accustomed to the treatment of the insane; and that another day such as that she had just passed would soon make her as ill as himself.

Our Bonny Bell did not seem so disturbed as might have been expected. When we went down to the coffee-room we found the Lieutenant and her sitting

at opposite sides of a small table, deeply engaged over a sheet of paper. On our entrance the document was hastily folded up and smuggled away.

"It is a secret," said the Lieutenant, anticipating inquiry. "You shall not know until we are away on our journey again. It is a packet to be opened in a quiet place—no houses near, no persons to listen; and then—and then——"

"Perhaps it will remain a secret? *Bien!* Life is not long enough to let one meddle with secrets; they take up so much time in explanation, and then they never contain anything."

"But this is a very wonderful thing," said the Lieutenant, "and you must hurry to get away from Worcester that you shall hear of it."

We were, however, to have another sealed packet that morning. Master Arthur, knowing full well that he would have but little chance of speaking privately with Bell, had entrusted his thoughts to a piece of paper and an envelope; and just as we were in the hurry of departure, the young man appeared. The truth was, the Lieutenant had ordered the horses to be put in some quarter of an hour before the time we had said we should start; and my Lady showed so much anxiety to set forth at once that I saw she hoped to leave before Arthur came.

The phaeton stood in the archway of the hotel,

and on the stone steps were flung the rugs and books.

"My dear," says Tita, rather anxiously, to Bell, "do get in! The horses seem rather fresh, and—and——"

"Won't you wait to bid good-bye to Arthur?" says Bell.

"It is impossible to say when he will come—he will understand—I will leave a message for him," says Queen Titania, all in a breath; and with that the Lieutenant assists Bell to get up in front.

I have the reins in my hand, awaiting orders. The last rugs are thrown up, books stowed away, everything in readiness; Tita takes her seat behind, and the Lieutenant is on the point of getting up.

At this moment Arthur comes round the corner amazed for a moment to see us ready to start, and then suddenly brings out a letter.

"Bell," he says, "I—I have—there is something here I want you to see—only a moment, and you can give me an answer now—yes or no——"

The unfortunate young man was obviously greatly excited; his face quite pale, and his speech rapid and broken. He handed up the letter: the crisis that Tita had endeavoured to avoid had come. But in this our darkest hour—as I have already hinted—Castor and Pollux came to the rescue. It was the battle of the Lake Regillus acted once again in the gateway of the

Worcester Star Hotel. For Pollux, casting his head about and longing to start, managed to fix his bit on the end of the pole; and, of course, a wild scene ensued. Despite the efforts of the ostler, the horse threw himself back on his haunches; the phaeton described a curve, and was driven against the wall with a loud crash; the people about fled in every direction, and the Lieutenant jumped out and sprang to the horses' heads. Pollux was still making violent efforts to extricate himself, and Castor, having become excited, was plunging about; so that for a moment it seemed as though the vehicle would be shattered in pieces against the wall of the court. The women were quite still, except that Tita uttered a little suppressed cry as she saw the Lieutenant hanging on to the rearing horses. He stuck manfully to their heads, and, with the assistance of the ostler, at last managed to get the bit off. Then both horses sprang forward. It would have been impossible to have confined them longer in this narrow place. The Lieutenant leaped in behind; and the next moment the phaeton was out in the main street of Worcester, both horses plunging and pulling so as to turn all eyes towards us. Certainly, it was a good thing the thoroughfare was pretty clear. The great Twin Brethren, not knowing what diabolical occurrence had marked their setting out, were speeding away from the place with might and main; and with scarcely a look

at Worcester we found ourselves out in the country again, amid quiet and wooded lanes, with all the sweet influences of a bright summer morning around us.

"I hope you are not hurt," said my Lady to the Lieutenant, who was looking about to see whether the smash had taken some of the paint off, or done other damage.

"Oh, not in the least, Madame," he said, "but I find that one of my boots is cut, so that I think the shoe of the horse must have done it. And has he caught on the pole before?"

"Only once," she says.

"Then I would have the bit made with bars across, so that it will be more difficult; for suppose this d happen in the road, and there was a ditch, and he backed you——"

"I suppose we should go over," remarked Queen Tit philosophically. "But it is strange how often acci dents in driving might occur, and how seldom they do occur. But we must really have the bit altered."

"Well," I say to my gentle companion, "what message did you leave with Arthur?"

"I could not leave any," said Bell, "for of course when the horses went back, he had to get out of their way. But he will understand that I will write to him."

"Have you read the letter?"

"No."

"Do, like a good girl, and have it over. That is always the best way. You must not go into this beautiful country that lies ahead with a sort of cloud over you."

So Bell took out the letter, and furtively opened it. She read it carefully over, without uttering a word; then she continued looking at it for a long time.

"I am very glad that accident occurred," she remarked, in a low voice. "He said I was to answer 'yes' or 'no.' I could not do that to such a letter as this; and if I had refused, he would have been very much hurt. I will write to him from whatever place we stop at to-night."

This resolution seemed greatly to comfort her. If any explanation were needed, it was postponed until the evening; and in the meantime we had fine weather, fresh air, and all the bright colours of an English landscape around us. Bell rapidly resumed her ordinary good spirits. She begged to have the reins; and when these had been handed over to her, with various cautions, the excitement of driving a pair of horses that yet showed considerable signs of freshness brought a new colour into her cheeks. The route which we now followed was one of the prettiest we had yet met with. Instead of following the old stage-coach route by Droitwich, we struck almost due north by a line of small and picturesque villages lying buried in the heart of

this deeply-wooded country. The first of these was Ombersley—a curious little clump of cottages, nearly all of which were white, with black bars of woodwork crossed and re-crossed; and they had odd gables, and lattices, and decorations, so that they looked almost like toy-cottages. Wearing white and black in this prominent way, our Uhlan immediately claimed them as Prussian property; but beyond the fact of their showing the Prussian colours, there was little else foreign-looking about those old-fashioned English houses lying along this level lane, and half hidden amid elms. As we got up into the higher ground above Ombersley we found around us a very pleasant landscape; and it seemed to strike my gentle-eyed companion that the names of the villages around had been chosen to accord with the tender and sylvan beauties of this pretty piece of country. One of the sign-posts we passed had inscribed on it, "To Doverdale and Hampton Lovett." Then in the neighbourhood are Elmley Lovett, Elmbridge, Crossway Green, and Gardeners' Grove; while down between these runs Doverdale Brook, skirting Westmoor Park, the large house of which we could see as a faint blue mound amid the general leafage. The country, which is flat about Ombersley, gets more undulating about Hartlebury and on towards Kidderminster. The roads wind up and down gentle hills, with tall and ruddy banks of sand on each side, which are hanging with

every variety of wild flower and wayside weed. On both hands dense woods come down to these tall and picturesque banks; and you drive through an atmosphere laden with moist and resinous scents.

It was fortunate for us, indeed, that before starting we had lived for a time in town; for all the various perfumes of the hedges and fields came upon us with a surprise. Every now and again, on these cool and breezy mornings, we would drive past a hay-field, with the fresh and sweet odours blowing all around. Or perhaps it was a great clump of wild-rose bushes that filled the air with delicate scent. Then the lime-trees were in flower; and who does not know the delight of passing under the boughs laden with blossom, when the bees are busy overhead? More rarely, but still frequently enough in this favoured country, a whiff of honeysuckle was borne to us as we passed. And if these things sweetened the winds that blew about us, consider what stars of colour refreshed the eye as we drove gently past the tall hedgerows and borders of woods—the golden rock-roses, purple patches of wild thyme, the white glimmering of stitchwort and campion, the yellow spires of the snapdragon, and a thousand others. And then, when we ceased to speak, there was no blank of silence. Away over the hay-field the lark floated in the blue, making the air quiver with his singing; the robin, perched on a fence, looked at us saucily, and piped a

few notes by way of remark; the blackbird was heard, flute-throated, down in the hollow recesses of the woods; and the thrush, in a holly-tree by the wayside, sang out his sweet, clear song, that seemed to rise in strength as the wind awoke a sudden rustling through the long woods of birch and oak.

"Well, touching that sealed packet?" says my Lady, aloud.

"Oh no, Madame," replies the Lieutenant. "This is not the time for it. If I must tell you the truth, it is only a drinking-song I have been trying to remember of a young Englishman who was at Bonn with me; and Mademoiselle was so good this morning as to alter some of the words. But now?—a drinking-song in this fine, quiet country?—No. After we have got to Kidderminster, and when we drive away after lunch, then Mademoiselle will play for you the air I did show to her, and I will sing you the song. All what is needed is that you drink some Rhine wine at Kidderminster to make you like the song."

"Kidderminster Rhine wine!" exclaims one of the party, with a groan. He knows that whatever is suggested now by the Lieutenant finds favour with a clear majority of the party.

"That was a very good young fellow," continues the Lieutenant, as we drive over a high slope, and come in view of a mass of manufactories. "Very big and

strong he was; we did call him *der grosse Engländer* always; and one time, in the winter, when there was much snow, we had a supper-party at his room. We had many duels then, for we were only boys, but the Englishman was not supposed to be challenged, for he knew nothing of our swords, but he was always ready to fight with his fists for all that. And this evening, I am afraid we did drink too much beer, and young Schweitzer of Magdeburg—he died at Königgrätz, the unfortunate, in '66—he was very angry with the Engländer for laughing at his sweetheart, who was but a young lady in a school there. And he challenged the Englishman, and went up to him, and said he would not go away until there was a fight; and do you know what your countryman did? He lifted Schweitzer up in his arms, like a baby, and carried him down the stairs, and opened the door, and put him in the snow outside, very gently. There was so much laughing over that, that we all said it was very good; and Schweitzer was grown sober by the cool of the snow; and he laughed too, and I think they swore *brüderschaft* about it afterwards. Oh, he was a very clever fellow, your countryman, and had more delight in our songs than any German I ever knew. But do you know how that is?"

Madame said it was no wonder anyone should be in love with the German songs; but the Lieutenant shook his head.

"That is not it at all: no. This is it—that when you know only a little of a language, you do not know what is commonplace in it. The simple phrase which is commonplace to others that is all full of meaning to you. So I find it with your English. You would laugh if I told you that I find much meaning in poetry that you think only good for children, and in old-fashioned writing, which looks affected now. Because, Madame, is it not true that all commonplace phrases meant some new thing at one time? It is only my ignorance that I do not know they have grown old and worth little. Now the evening at Twickenham I did hear you go over the names of old-fashioned English songs, and much fun was made of the poetry. But to me, that was very good—a great deal of it—because nothing in English is to me commonplace as yet."

"How fortunate you must be," says one of us, with a sigh.

"You laugh when you say, '*Flow on, thou shining river!*' Why? The river flows: and it shines. I see a clear picture out of the words—like the man who wrote them; I am not accustomed to them so as to think them stupid. Then I saw you laugh when some one said, '*I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls.*' I did read that song; and although it is stupid that the man thinks he will live in marble halls, I found much tenderness in it. So with this young Englishman. He

knew nothing of what was commonplace in our language. If you gave him children's rhymes, he looked at the meaning; and judged it all by that. And when we showed him stiff, artificial verses of old times, he seemed to go back to the time when they were written, and believe much in them, and like them. That is a very good thing in ignorance, I think—when you know not much of a language, and every word has much meaning in it, and there is no commonplace anywhere."

This lecture of the Lieutenant took us into Kidderminster. What married man is not familiar with the name—held up to him as an awful threat in reply to his grumblings about the price of Turkey and Brussels carpets? As we drove into the busy town, signs of the prevailing manufacture were everywhere apparent in the large red-brick factories. We put up at the "Lion," and while Von Rosen went off to buy himself a new pair of boots, we went for a stroll up to the interesting old church, the fine brasses and marble monuments of which have drawn many a stranger to the spot. Then we climbed to the top of the tower, and from the zinc roof thereof had a spacious view over the level and wooded country, which was deeply streaked by bands of purple, where the clouds threw their shadows. Far below us lay the red, busy, smoky town set amid green fields; while the small river ran through it like a black

snake, for the bed had been drained, and in the dark mud a multitude of boys could be seen wading, scooping about for eels. When we descended, Von Rosen had got his boots, and was prowling about the churchyard, reading the curious inscriptions there. One of them informed the world of the person laid beneath that, "added to the character of a Gentleman, his actions were coeval with his Integrity, Hospitality, and Benevolence." But our amiable guide, who had pointed out to us all the wonderful features of Kidderminster and its neighbourhood, evidently looked on one particular grave-stone as the chief curiosity of the place; for this, he informed us, was placed over a man who had prepared the vault and the inscription ten years before his death. Here is the legend:—

"To the Memory of
JOHN ORTON,
A MAN FROM LEICESTERSHIRE,
And when he is dead he must lie under HERE."

The man from Leicestershire was not "alone among mortals" in anticipating his end in this fashion; but no matter. A man may well be allowed to humour himself in the way of a tombstone; it is the last favour he can ask from the world.

"Now," said the Lieutenant, as we drove away from this manufacturing town into the fresh country again, "shall I sing you the song which the young English-

man used to sing for us; or shall we wait until the evening?"

"Now, by all means," said Bell; "and if you will be so good as to give me out the guitar, I will try to play you an accompaniment."

"A guitar accompaniment to a drinking-song!" says Titania.

"Oh, but this is not a drinking-song, exactly, Madame—it is a very moral song; and we shall discuss each verse as it goes along, and you will make alterations of it."

So he got out the guitar. We were now far away from any houses—all around us great woods, that lay dark and green under a clouded afternoon sky. The road was very hilly; and sometimes, from the summit of a great height, we caught a glimpse of a long western stretch of country, lying blue and misty under the grey sky. Behind us Kidderminster looked like a dusky red splatch in a plain of green; and all around it the meadows and fields were low and intense in colour. But then in the west we could see an occasional glimpse of yellow in the pall of cloud; and we hoped the sunset would break through the veil.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the Lieutenant, "the song I am about to sing to you——"

Here Bell began to play a light prelude; and without further introduction our Uhlan startled the silence of

the woods and fields by singing, in a profound and melancholy voice, the first two verses of the ballad composed by the young Englishman at Bonn, which ran somewhat as follows:—

"Oh, Burgundy isn't a good thing to drink,
Young man, I beseech you, consider and think,
Or else in your nose, and likewise in your toes,
You'll discover the colour of Burgundy rose:
Burgundy rose, Burgundy rose,
A dangerous symptom is Burgundy rose.

"'Tis a very nice wine, and as mellow as milk,
'Tis a very nice colour, in satin or silk;
But you'll change your opinion as soon as it shows
In a halo around the extreme of your nose:
Burgundy rose, Burgundy rose,
Is a very bad thing at the tip of your toes."

"Well, Madame, how do you like it so far as we have got?" says the Lieutenant, as Bell is extemporising a somewhat wild variation of the air.

"I think your young English friend gave you very good advice; and I have no doubt the students needed it very much."

"But you shall hear what he says; he was not a teetotaller at all."

And therewith the Lieutenant continued:—

"If tipple you must, in beer, spirits, or wine,
There are wholesome vintages hail from the Rhine;
And, take the advice of a fellow who knows,
Hochheimer's as gentle as any that goes —
Burgundy rose, Burgundy rose,
Doth never appear from the wine I propose.

"Oh, Burgundy isn't a good thing to drink,
Young man, I beseech you, consider and think,
Or else in your nose, and likewise in your toes,
You'll discover the colour of Burgundy rose:
Burgundy rose, Burgundy rose,
A fatal affliction is Burgundy rose!"

"Oh, you two scapegraces!" cried Queen Titania. "I know now why you were laying your heads together this morning, and poring over that sheet of paper; you were engaged in perverting an honest and well-intentioned song into a recommendation of German wines. I am sure that third verse is not in the original. I am certain the young English student never wrote it. It was written in Worcester this very morning; and I call on you to produce the original, so that we may cut out this very bad moral that has been introduced."

"The original, Madame?" said the Lieutenant, gravely. "There is no original. I have repeated it most from memory—as he used to sing it at Bonn—and I put it down on paper only that Mademoiselle might correct me about the words. No—I have put in no moral. You think your countryman did not like the Rhine wines? Pfui!—you should have seen him drink them then, if he did not like them! And the very dear ones, too, for he had plenty of money; and we poor devils of the Germans used to be astonished at his extravagance, and sometimes he was called 'milord' for a joke. When we did go to his room to the supper-

parties, we could not believe that any young man not come of age should have so much money given to him by his parents. But it did not spoil him one bit; he was as good, frank, careless as any man, and when he did get to know the language better he worked hard, and had such notes of the lectures as not anyone, I think, in the whole university had."

A strange thing now occurred. We were driving along level and wooded lanes, running parallel with the Severn. The small hamlets we passed, merely two or three houses smothered in elms, are appropriately named greens—Fen Green, Dodd's Green, Bard's Green, and the like; and on either side of us were lush meadows, with the cattle standing deep in the grass. Now all at once that long bar of glimmering yellow across the western clouds burst asunder; and at the same moment a glare of light shone along the southern sky, where there was evidently abundant rain. We had no sooner turned to look at this flood of golden mist, than all around us there was a stir in the hedges and the tall elms by the roadside—we were enveloped in sunshine; with it came a quick pattering on the leaves; and then we found the air glittering with white drops and slanting streaks. In the wild glare of the sunlight the shower shone and sparkled around us, and the heavier it fell—until the sound of it was like the hissing of the sea on a pebbly beach—the more magical grew the effects of the mingled

light and wet. Nor was it a passing shower merely. The air was still filled with the gleaming lines of the rain, the sunlight still shone mistily through it and lit up the green meadows and the trees with a wonderful radiance, as we wrapped cloaks round our companions and drove leisurely on. It was impossible to think that this luminous rain could wet us like ordinary rain. But by and by it drew itself off; and then Bell, with a sudden little cry, besought the Lieutenant to pull up the horses.

Had we driven under a cloud, and escaped at the other edge? Close behind us there was still mingled rain and sunlight; but beyond that again the sky was heaped up with immense dark blue masses. A rainbow shone in front of this black background. A puff of white cloud ran across the darkness, telling of contrary winds. And then when we turned from this gleaming and glowing picture to continue our course, lo! all the west had cleared, and a great dim smoke of yellow lay over the land, where the sky came down.

"It is like the sea, is it not?" said Bell, rising up in the phaeton and steadying herself to look into this distant world of gold. "Don't you expect to find the masts of ships and sea-birds flying about out there?"

And then in the cool and fresh evening, with the dusk coming on, we drove up the valley of the Severn, by Quat and Quatford, towards our resting-place for

the night. As we passed by Quatford Castle, the river, lying amid the dark meadows, had caught a glow of crimson fire from the last reflection of the sunset. A blue mist lay about the sides of the abrupt hill on which the town of Bridgenorth is pitched; but as we wound round the hill to gain the easiest ascent, we came again into the clear, metallic glow of the west. It was a hard pull on the horses, just at the end of their day's work, was this steep and circuitous ascent; but at length we got into the rough streets of the old town, and in the fading twilight sought out the yellow and comfortable glow of the Crown Hotel.

We had got in passing a vague glimpse of a wide space around an old town-house, with a small crowd of people collecting. They had come to hear the playing of a Volunteer band. Therefore, as we sat down to dinner, we had some very good music being played to us from without; and when at last it was gone, and the quaint old town on the top of the hill left to its ordinary silence, we found it was time to light our cigars and open the bézique-box.

Probably no one noticed it; but it is a curious circumstance that Bell had apparently forgotten all about her determination to write to Arthur. There was no shadow of a cloud on her face, and she enjoyed the winning of various games—assisted thereto by the obvious ministrations of the Lieutenant—with as much

delight and careless amusement as though there was not anywhere in the world a young man sitting in his solitary chamber and wishing that he had never been born. But it was certainly not hard-heartedness that gave to Bell the enjoyment of that one evening.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SHREWSBURY PLAY.

"But (trust me, gentles !) never yet
Was dight a masquing half so neat,
Or half so rich before ;
The country lent the sweet perfumes,
The sea the pearl, the sky the plumes,
The town its silken store."

THE Lieutenant was pensive. He and I had gone out for a turn before breakfast, and wandered on to the high promenade which, skirting one portion of the lofty town, looked down on the valley of the Severn, the huddled houses underneath the rocky height, and the bridge spanning the stream. It was a bright and cool morning; and the landscape that lay around was shining in the sun.

"England," he said, leaning his arms on the stone parapet of the walk, "is a very pleasant country to live in, I think."

I thanked him for the compliment.

"You are very free in your actions here: you do what you please. Only consider how you are at this moment."

But I had to protest against our young Prussian friend continually regarding this excursion as the normal condition of our existence. I showed him that we were not always enjoying ourselves in this fashion; that a good deal of hard work filled the long interval of the winter months; and that even Bell—whom he had grown to regard as a sort of feature of English scenery—a wild bird for ever on the wing through sunlight and green leaves—worked as hard as any of us.

"It is pleasant to be able to play dexterously on the piano, or the guitar, or what not, but that accomplishment means imprisonment with hard labour stretching over years. It is very nice to be able to put on a sheet of paper, with a few rapid touches, the outlines of a scene which delights you, and to find yourself able to reproduce this afterwards in water or oil, and have it publicly exhibited and sold; but do you know how much work it involves? Bell is a most untiring young woman, I promise you, and not likely to fall asleep in counting her fingers."

"Oh, I am sure of that," he said, absently. "She has too much spirit, too much life, to be indolent. But I was thinking—I was thinking whether, if a man was to

change his country, he would choose England out of all the other countries to live in. Here it is. Your people in England who only enjoy themselves must be very rich, must they not? Is it a good country, I wonder, for a man who would have about 800*l.* a year?"

"Not without some occupation. But why do you ask?"

He only stared at the bushes down below us on the rocks, and at the river far below them.

"What would you say," he asked, suddenly, "if I were to come and live in England, and become naturalized, and never go back to my native country again?"

"And give up your profession, with all its interest and excitement?"

He was silent for a minute or two; and then he said—

"I have done more than the service that is expected from every man in Prussia; and I do not think my country goes to war for many years to come. About the excitement of a campaign and the going into battle —well, there is much mistake about that. You are not always in enthusiasm; the long marches, the wet days, the waiting for months in one place—there is nothing heroic in that. And when you do come to the battle itself,—come, my dear friend, I will tell you something about that."

He seemed to wake up then. He rose from his

recumbent position and took a look round the shining country that lay along the valley of the Severn.

"All the morning before the battle," said the Lieutenant, "you have great gloom; and it seems as if the day is dark overhead. But this is strange—that you think you can see very far, and you can see all your friends in Germany, and think you could almost speak to them. You expect to go forward to meet the enemy; and you hate him that he is waiting for you upon some of the hills or behind his entrenchments. Then the hurry comes of getting on horseback; and you are very friendly to all your companions—and they are all very pleasant and laughing at this time, except one or two, who are thinking of their home. Your regiment is ordered forward: you do not know what to think: perhaps you wish the enemy would run away, or that your regiment is not needed, and sometimes you have great wish of anger towards him; but all this is shifting, gloomy, uncertain, that you do not think two things one moment. Then you hear the sound of the firing, and your heart beats fast for a little while, and you think of all your friends in Germany; and this is the time that is the worst. You are angry with all the men who provoke wars in their courts and parliaments; and you think it is a shame you should be there to fight for them; and you look at the pleasant things you are leaving all behind in your own home,

just as if you were never to see them any more. That is a very wretched and miserable time, but it does not last very long if you are ordered to advance; and then, my dear friend, I can assure you that you do not care one farthing for your own life—that you forget your home altogether, and you think no more of your friends; you do not even hate the enemy in front any more—it is all a stir, and life, and eagerness; and a warm, glad feeling runs all through your veins, and when the great 'hurrah' comes, and you ride forward, you think no more of yourself; you say to yourself, 'Here is for my good Fatherland!'—and then——"

A sort of sob stuck in the throat of the big Lieutenant.

"Bah," said he, with a frown, as if the bright morning and the fresh air had done him an injury, "what is the use of waiting out here, and killing ourselves with hunger?"

Bell was writing when we went into the hotel. As we entered she hastily shut up her small portfolio.

"Why not finish your letter, Mademoiselle?" he said, gently. "It will be a little time before breakfast comes in."

"I can finish it afterwards," said the girl, looking rather embarrassed.

Of course, when the Lieutenant perceived that the attention thus drawn to the letter had caused her some

confusion, he immediately rushed into another subject, and said to Queen Titania, with a fine affectation of carelessness—

"You will laugh, Madame, at our having yet another adventure in a stationer's shop."

"I think," said my Lady, gravely, "that I must put a stop to these wanderings about in the early morning. I cannot quite make out why you should always get up hours before anybody else; but I find that generally some story is revealed afterwards of a young lady."

"But there is no young lady this time," said the Lieutenant, "but a very worthy man whom we found in the stationer's shop. And he has been at Sedan, and he has brought back the breech of a mitrailleuse and showed it all to us, and he has written a small book about his being in France, and did present us with a copy of it, and would not take any payment for it. Oh, he is a very remarkable and intelligent man to be found in a stationer's shop up in this curious old town on the top of a hill; but then I discovered he is a Scotchman, and do you not say here that a Scotchman is a great traveller, and is to be found everywhere? And I have looked into the little book, and I think it very sensible and good, and a true account of what he has seen."

"Then I presume he extols your countrymen?" says my Lady, with a smile.

"Madame," replies the Lieutenant, "I may assure you of this, that a man who has been in a campaign and seen both the armies, does not think either army an army of angels and the other an army of demons. To believe one nation to have all the good, and another nation to have all the bad, that can only be believed by people who have seen none of them. I think my friend the stationer has written so much of what he saw, that he had no time for stupid imaginations about the character of two whole countries."

At this moment the introduction of breakfast broke our talk in this direction. After breakfast Bell finished her letter. She asked the Lieutenant to get it stamped and posted for her, and handed it openly to him. But, without looking at it, he must have known that it was addressed to "Arthur Ashburton, Esq., Essex Court, Temple."

"Well," said Bell, coming downstairs with her hat on, "let us go out now, and see the town. It must be a very pleasant old place. And the day is so fine;—don't you think we have had quite exceptional weather hitherto, Count von Rosen?"

Of course he said the weather had been lovely; but how was it that Bell was so sure beforehand that she would be pleased with Bridgenorth? The delight was already in her face, and beaming in her eyes.

She knew the weather must be fine. She was certain we should have a delicious drive during the day, and was positive the country through which we had to pass would be charming. The observant reader will remark that a certain letter had been posted.

Really, Bridgenorth was pleasant enough on this bright morning, albeit the streets on the river-side part of the town were distinctly narrow, dirty, and smoky. First of all, however, we visited the crumbling walls of Robert de Belesme's mighty tower. Then we took the women round the high promenade over the valley. Then we went down through a curious and precipitous passage hewn out of the sandstone hill to the lower part of the town, and visited the old building in which Bishop Percy was born, the inscription [1] on which, by the way, is a standing testimony to the playful manner in which this nation has from time immemorial dealt with its aspirates. Then we clambered up the steep streets again until we reached the great central square, with its quaint town-house and old-fashioned shops. A few minutes thereafter we were in the phaeton, and Castor and Pollux taking us into the open country again.

[1] The inscription inside the door of this old-fashioned building, which is ornamented by bars of black and white, and peaked gables, is as follows :—

"Except the Lord BVILD THE OWSE
The Labourers thereof evail nothing
Erected by R For * 1580."

"Mademoiselle!" said the Lieutenant—the young man was like a mavis, with this desire of his to sing or hear singing just after his morning meal—"you have not sung to us anything for a long while now."

"But I will this morning, with great pleasure," said Bell.

"Then," said Von Rosen, "here is your guitar. When I saw you come down to go out this morning, I said to myself, 'Mademoiselle is sure to sing to-day.' So I kept out the guitar-case."

The horses pricked up their ears. The cords of the guitar twanged out a few notes. The fresh breeze blew by from the fields; and as we drove through the stillness of one or two straggling woods, Bell sang—

"If enemies oppose us,
And England is at war
With any foreign nation,
We fear not wound nor scar!
To humble them, come on, lads!
Their flags we'll soon lay low;
Clear the way, for the fray:
Though the stormy winds do blow!"

"Mademoiselle," cries the Lieutenant, "it is a challenge."

Bell laughed, and suddenly altered the key.

"Fair Hebe I left with a cautious design"—

this was what she sang now—

"To escape from her charms and to drown love in wine;
I tried it, but found, when I came to depart,
The wine in my head, but still love in my heart."

"Well," said Tita, with an air of astonishment, "that is a pretty song for a young lady to sing!"

Bell laid down the guitar.

"And what," I ask of Queen Titania, "are the sentiments of which alone a young lady may sing? Not patriotism? Not love? Not despair? Goodness gracious! Don't you remember what old Joe Blatchers said when he brought us word that some woman in his neighbourhood had committed suicide?"

"What did he say?" asked the Lieutenant with a great curiosity.

"The wretched woman had drowned herself because her husband had died; and old Joe brought us the story with the serious remark, '*The ladies 'as their feelins, 'asn't they, sir, arter all?*' Mayn't a young lady sing of anything but the joy of decorating a church on Christmas Eve?"

"I have never been taught to perceive the humour of profanity," says my Lady, with a serene impassiveness.

"Curious, if true. Perhaps you were never taught that a white elephant isn't the same as a rainbow or a pack of cards?"

"My dear," says Tita, turning to Bell, "what is that French song that you brought over with you from Dieppe?"

Thus appealed to, Bell took up her guitar, and

sang for us a very pretty song. It was not exactly French, to be sure. It began—

> "'Twas frost and thro' leet, wid a greyming o' snaw,
> When I went to see Biddy, the flow'r o' them aw;
> To meet was agreed on at Seymy' deyke nuik,
> Where I sauntered wi' mony a scegh and lang luik."

But good honest Cumbrian is quite as foreign to most of us as French; and no exception could be taken to the sentiment of Bell's ballad, for none of us could understand six consecutive words of it.

Much-Wenlock is a quiet town. It is about as quiet as the spacious and grassy enclosure in which the magnificent ruins of its old monastery stand grey and black in the sunshine. There are many strange passages and courts in these noble ruins; and as you wander through broken arches, and over courtyards half hid in the long green grass, it is but natural that a preference for solitude should betray itself in one or other of the members of a noisy little party. We lost sight of Bell and the Lieutenant. There was a peacock strutting through the grass, and making his resplendent tail gleam in the sunshine; and they followed him, I think. When we came upon them again, Bell was seated on a bit of tumbled pillar, pulling daisies out of the sward and plaiting them; and the Lieutenant was standing by her side, talking to her in a low voice. It was no business of ours to

interfere with this pastoral occupation. Doubtless he spoke in these low tones because of the great silence of the place. We left them there, and had another saunter before we returned. We were almost sorry to disturb them; for they made a pretty group, these two young folks, talking leisurely to each other under the solemn magnificence of the great grey ruins, while the sunlight that lit up the ivy on the walls, and threw black shadows under the arches of the crumbling windows, and lay warm on the long grass around them, touched Bell's cheek too, and glimmered down one side of the loose and splendid masses of her hair.

Castor and Pollux were not allowed much time for lunch; for, as the young people had determined to go to the theatre on reaching Shrewsbury, their elders, warned by a long experience, knew that the best preparation for going to a country theatre is to dine before setting out. My Lady did not anticipate much enjoyment; but Bell was positive we should be surprised.

"We have been out in the country so much—seeing so much of the sunlight and the green trees, and living at those little inns—that we ought to have a country theatre as well. Who knows but that we may have left all our London ideas of a play in London; and find ourselves quite delighted with the simple folk

who are always uttering good sentiments, and quite enraged with the bad man who is wishing them ill. I think Count von Rosen was quite right——"

Of course Count von Rosen was quite right!

"—— about commonplace things only having become commonplace through our familiarity with them," continued Miss Bell; "perhaps we may find ourselves going back a bit, and being as much impressed by a country drama as any of the farmer-folk who do not see half-a-dozen plays in their life. And then, you know, what a big background we shall have!—not the walls of the little theatre, but all the great landscape we have been coming through. Round about us we shall see the Severn, and the long woods, and Broadway Hill——"

"And not forgetting Bourton Hill," says the Lieutenant. "If only they do give us a good moonlight scene like that, we shall be satisfied."

"Oh no!" said Bell gravely—she was evidently launching into one of her unconscious flights, for her eyes took no more notice of us, but were looking wistfully at the pleasant country around us—"that is asking far too much. It is easier for you to make the moonlight scene than for the manager. You have only to imagine it is there—shut your eyes a little bit, and fancy you hear the people on the stage talking in a real scene, with the real country around, and the real

moonlight in the air. And then you grow to believe in the people—and you forget that they are only actors and actresses working for their salaries—and you think it is a true story, like the stories they tell up in Westmoreland of things that have happened in the villages years ago. That is one of the great pleasures of driving, is it not?—that it gives you a sense of wide space. There is a great deal of air and sky about it; and you have a pleasant and easy way of getting through it, as if you were really sailing; whereas the railway whisks you through the long intervals, and makes your journey a succession of dots. That is an unnatural way of travelling, that staccato method of——"

Here Mademoiselle caught sight of Queen Tita gravely smiling, and immediately paused to find out what she had been saying.

"Well?" she said, expecting to be corrected or reproved, and calmly resolved to bear the worst.

But how could Tita explain? She had been amused by the manner in which the young lady had unconsciously caught up a trick of the Lieutenant's in the construction of his sentences—the use of "that" as the introductory nominative, the noun coming in afterwards. For the moment the subject dropped, in the excitement of our getting once more back to the Severn; and when Bell spoke next, it was to ask the Lieutenant whether

the Wrekin—a solitary, abrupt, and conical hill on our right, which was densely wooded to the top—did not in a milder form reproduce the odd masses of rock that stud the great plain west of the Lake of Constance.

A pleasant drive through a fine stretch of open country took us into Shrewsbury; and here, having got over the bridge and up the steep thoroughfares to our hotel, dinner was immediately ordered. When at length we made our way round to the theatre it was about half-past seven, and the performance was to commence at twenty minutes to eight.

"Oh, Bell!" says my Lady, as we enter the building. She looks blankly round. From the front of the dress circle we are peering into a great hollow place, dimly lighted by ten lamps, each of one burner, that throw a sepulchral light on long rows of wooden benches, on a sad-coloured curtain and an empty orchestra. How is all the force of Bell's imagination to drive off these walls and this depressing array of carpentry, and substitute for them a stage of greensward and walls composed of the illimitable sky? There is an odour of escaped gas, and of oranges; but when did any people ever muster up enough of gaiety to eat an orange in this gloomy hall?

7.30, by Shrewsbury clock.—An old gentleman and a boy appear in the orchestra. The former is possessed of a bass-viol; the latter proceeds to tune up a violin.

7.40—which is the time for commencing the play—three ladies come into the pit. The first is a farmer's wife, fat, ostentatious, happy in a black silk that rustles; the two others are apparently friends of hers in the town, who follow her meekly, and take their seats with a frightened air. She sits down with a proud gesture; and this causes a thin crackle of laughter and a rude remark far up in the semi-darkness overhead, so that we gather that there are probably two persons in the upper gallery.

7.45.—Two young ladies—perhaps shop-girls, but their extreme blushing gives them a countrified look—come into the pit, talk in excited whispers to each other, and sit down with an uncomfortable air of embarrassment. At this moment the orchestra startles us by dashing into a waltz from "Faust." There are now five men and a boy in this tuneful choir. One of them starts vigorously on the cornet; but invariably fails to get beyond the first few notes, so that the flute beats him hollow. Again and again the cornet strikes in at the easy parts; but directly he subsides again, and the flute has it all his own way. The music ceases. The curtain is drawn up. The play has begun.

The first act is introductory. There is a farmer, whose chief business it is to announce that "his will is law;" and he has a son addressed throughout as Weelyam, whom he wishes to marry a particular girl.

The son, of course, has married another. The villain appears, and takes us into his confidence; giving us to understand that a worse villain never trod the earth. He has an interview with the farmer; but this is suddenly broken off—a whistle in some part of the theatre is heard, and we are conveyed to an Italian lake, all shining with yellow villas and blue skies.

"That is the problem stated," said the Lieutenant; "now we shall have the solution. But do you find the walls going away yet, Mademoiselle?"

"I think it is very amusing," said Bell, with a bright look on her face. Indeed, if she had not brought in with her sufficient influence from the country to resolve the theatre into thin air, she had imbibed a vast quantity of good health and spirits there, so that she was prepared to enjoy anything.

The plot thickens. The woman-villain appears—a lady dressed in deep black, who tells us in an awful voice that she was the mistress of Weelyam in France—that being the country naturally associated in the mind of the dramatist with crimes of this character. She is in a pretty state when she learns that Weelyam is married; and events are plainly marching on to a crisis. It comes. The marriage is revealed to the farmer, who delivers a telling curse, which is apparently launched at the upper gallery, but which is really meant to confound Weelyam; then the old man falls—there

is a tableau—the curtain comes down, and the band, by some odd stroke of luck, plays "Home, sweet home," as an air descriptive of Weelyam's banishment.

We become objects of curiosity, now that the adventures of the farmer's son are removed. There are twenty-one people in the pit—representing conjointly a solid guinea transferred to the treasury. One or two gay young men with canes, and their hats much on the side of their heads, have entered the dress-circle, stared for a minute or two at the stage, and retired.

They are probably familiar with rustic drama, and hold it in contempt. A good ballet, now, would be more in their way, performed by a *troupe* of young ladies whose names are curiously like English names, with imposing French and Italian terminations. A gentleman comes into the pit along with a friend, nods familiarly to the attendant, deposits his friend, utters a few facetious remarks, and leaves: can it be that he is a reporter of a local newspaper, dowered with the privilege of free admission for "himself and one?" There must at least be three persons in the upper gallery, for a new voice is heard, calling out the graceful but not unfamiliar name of "Polly." One of the two rose-red maidens in front of us timidly looks up, and is greeted with a shout of recognition and laughter. She drops into her old position in

a second, and hangs down her head; while her companion protests in an indignant way in order to comfort her. The curtain rises.

The amount of villany in this Shrewsbury drama is really getting beyond a joke. We are gradually rising in the scale of dark deeds, until the third villain, who now appears, causes the other two to be regarded as innocent lambs. This new performer of crime is a highwayman; and his very first act is to shoot Weelyam's father and rob him of his money. But lo! the French adventuress drops from the clouds: the highwayman is her husband: she tells him of her awful deeds, among them of her having murdered "her mistress the Archduchess;" and then, as she vows she will go and murder Weelyam, a tremendous conflict of everybody ensues, and a new scene being run on, we are suddenly whirled up to Balmoral Castle.

"I am beginning to be very anxious about the good people," remarked Tita. "I am afraid William will be killed."

"Unless he has as many lives as Plutarch, he can't escape," said Bell.

"As for the old farmer," observed the Lieutenant, "he survives apoplectic fits and pistol-shots very well —oh, very well indeed. He is a very good man in a play. He is sure to last to the end."

Well, we were near the end; and author, carpenter,

and scene-painter had done their dead best to render the final scene impressive. It was in a cavern. Cimmerian darkness prevailed. The awful lady in black haunts the gloomy byways of the rocks, communing with herself, and twisting her arms so that the greatest agony is made visible. But what is this hooded and trembling figure that approaches? Once in the cavern, the hood is thrown off, and the palpitating heroine comes forward for a second to the low footlights, merely that there shall be no mistake about her identity. The gloom deepens. The young and innocent wife encounters the French adventuress; the woman who did not scruple to murder her mistress the Archduchess seizes the girl by her hands—shrieks are heard—the two figures twist round one another—then a mocking shout of laughter, and Weelyam's wife is precipitated into the hideous waters of the lake! But lo! the tread of innumerable feet; from all quarters of the habitable globe stray wanderers arrive: with a shout Weelyam leaps into the lake, and when it is discovered that he has saved his wife, behold! everybody in the play is found to be around him, and with weeping and with laughter all the story is told, and the drama ends in the most triumphant and comfortable manner, in the middle of the night, in a cavern, a hundred miles from anywhere.

"No," said Queen Titania, distinctly, "I will *not*

stay to see *La Champagne Ballet or the Pas de Fascination.*"

So there was nothing for it but to take the ungrateful creature back to the hotel, and give her tea and a novel. As for the billiard-room in that hotel, it is one of the best between Holborn and the Canongate. The Lieutenant begs to add, that he can recommend the beer.

CHAPTER XV.

"LA PATRIE EN DANGER."

"Sometimes on lonely mountain-meres,
I find a magic bark;
I leap on board: no helmsman steers
I float till all is dark."

I SIT down to write this chapter with a determination to be generous, calm, and modest in the last degree. The man who would triumph over the wife of his bosom merely to have the pleasure of saying "I told you so," does not deserve to have his path through life sweetened by any such tender companionship. Far be it from me to recall the earnest protestations which my Lady affixed to the first portion of this narrative. Not for worlds would I inquire into her motives for being so anxious to see Arthur go. The ways of a woman ought to be intricate, occult, perplexing, if only to preserve something of the mystery of life around her, and to serve her, also, as a refuge from the coarse and rude

logic of the actual world. The foolish person who, to prove himself right, would drive his wife into a corner, and demonstrate to her that she was wrong—that she had been guilty of small prevarications, of trifling bits of hypocrisy, and of the use of various arts to conceal her real belief and definite purpose—the man who would thus wound the gentle spirit by his side to secure the petty gratification of proving himself to have been something of a twopenny-halfpenny prophet—but these remarks are premature at the present moment, and I go on to narrate the events which happened on the day of our leaving Shrewsbury, and getting into the solitary region of the meres.

"I have received a telegram from Arthur," says Bell, calmly: and the pink sheet is lying on the breakfast-table before her.

"How did you get it?" says my Lady, with some surprise.

"At the post-office."

"Then you have been out?"

"Yes, we went for a short walk, after having waited for you," says Bell, looking down.

"Oh, Madame," says the Lieutenant, coming forward from the fireplace, "you must not go away from the town without seeing it well. It is handsome, and the tall poplars down by the side of the river, they are worth going to see by themselves."

"It was very pretty this morning," continued Bell "when the wind was blowing about the light blue smoke, and the sun was shining down on the slates and the clumps of trees. We went to a height on the other side of the river, and I have made a sketch of it——"

"Pray," says my Lady, regarding our ward severely, "when did you go out this morning?"

"Perhaps about an hour and a half ago," replies Bell carelessly; "I don't exactly know."

"More than that, I think," says the Lieutenant, "for I did smoke two cigars before we came back. It is much to our credit to get up so early, and not anything to be blamed of."

"I am glad Bell is improving in that respect," retorts my Lady, with a wicked smile; and then she adds, "Well?"

"He has started," is the reply to that question.

"And is going by another route?"

"Yes: in a dog-cart—by himself. Don't you think it is very foolish of him, Tita? You know what accidents occur with those dog-carts."

"Mademoiselle, do not alarm yourself," says the Lieutenant, folding up his newspaper. "It is quite true what Madame said yesterday, that there are so many accidents in driving, and so very seldom anyone hurt. You ask your friends—yes, they have all had accidents

in their riding and driving; they have all been in great danger, but what have they suffered?—Nothing! Sometimes a man is killed—yes, one out of several millions in the year. And if he tumbles over—which is likely if he does not know much of horses and driving—what then? No, there is no fear; we shall see him some day very well, and go on all together!"

"Oh, shall we?" says my Lady, evidently regarding this as a new idea.

"Certainly. Do you think he goes that way always? Impossible. He will tire of it. He will study the roads across to meet us. He will overtake us with his light little dog-cart; we shall have his company along the road."

Tita did not at all look so well satisfied with this prospect of meeting an old friend as she might have done.

"And when are you to hear from him next?" I inquire of Mademoiselle.

'He will either write or telegraph to each of the big towns along our route, on the chance of the message intercepting us somewhere; and so we shall know where he is."

"And he has really started?"

Bell placed the telegram in my hands. It was as follows:—

"*Have set out by Hatfield, Huntingdon, and York, for*

Edinburgh. Shall follow the real old coach-road to Scotland; and am certain to find much entertainment."

"For man and beast," struck in the Lieutenant. "And I know of a friend of mine travelling in your country who went into one of these small inns, and put up his horse, and when they brought him in his luncheon to the parlour, he only looked at it and said, '*Very good, waiter; this is very nice; but where is the entertainment for the man?*"

I continued to read the telegram aloud—

"*Shall probably be in Edinburgh before you; but will telegraph or write to each big town along your route, that you may let me know where you are.*"

"It is very obliging," says the Lieutenant, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"It is quite certain," observes my Lady, with decision, "that he must not accompany us in his dog-cart; for we shall arrive at plenty of inns where they could not possibly put up three horses and so many people."

"It would have been so," said the Lieutenant, "at the place on the top of the hill—Bourton was it called, yes?"

The mere notion of Arthur coming in to spoil the enjoyment of that rare evening was so distressing, that we all took refuge in breakfast, after which we went for a long and leisurely stroll through Shrewsbury; and

then had Castor and Pollux put into the phaeton. It seemed now to us to matter little at what town we stayed. We had almost begun to forget the various points of the journey. It was enough that some hospitable place—whether it were city, town, or hamlet—afforded us shelter for the night, that on the next morning we could issue forth again into the sweet-smelling country air, and have all the fair green world to ourselves. We looked with a lenient eye upon the great habitations of men. What if a trifle of coal-smoke hung about the house-tops, and that the streets were not quite so clean as they might be? We suffered little from these inconveniences. They only made us rejoice the more to get out into the leafy lanes, where the air was fresh with the scent of the bean-fields and the half-dried hay. And when a town happened to be picturesque—and it was our good fortune to find a considerable number of handsome cities along our line of route—and combined with its steep streets, its old-fashioned houses, and its winding river and banks, a fair proportion of elms and poplars scattered about in clumps to mar the monotony of the grey fronts and the blue slates, we paid such a tribute of admiration as could only be obtained from people who knew they would soon be emancipated from the din and clamour, the odour and the squalor, of thoroughfares and pavements.

Bell, sitting very erect, and holding the whip and reins in the most accurate and scientific fashion, was driving us leisurely up the level and pleasant road leading from Shrewsbury to Ellesmere. The country was now more open and less hilly than that through which we had recently come. Occasionally, as in the neighbourhood of Harmer Hill, we drove by long woods; but for the most part our route lay between spacious meadows, fields, and farms, with the horizon around lying blue and dark under the distant sky. The morning had gradually become overcast, and the various greens of the landscape were darkened by the placid grey overhead. There was little wind, but a prevailing coolness that seemed to have something of premonitory moistness in it.

But how the birds sang under the silence of that cold grey sky! We seemed to hear all the sounds within a great compass, and these were exclusively the innumerable notes of various warblers—in the hedges, and in the road-side trees, far away in woods, or hidden up in the level greyness of the clouds: *Tewi, tewi, trrrr-weet! —droom, droom, phloee!—tuck, tuck, tuck, tuck, feer!*— that was the silvery chorus from thousands of throats, and, under the darkness of the grey sky, the leaves of the trees and the woods seemed to hang motionless in order to listen. Now and then Bell picked out the call of a thrush or a blackbird from the almost indistinguishable

mass of melody; but it seemed to us that all the fields and hedges had but one voice, and that it was clear, and sweet, and piercing, in the strange silence reigning over the land.

So we rolled along the unfrequented road, occasionally passing a wayside tavern, a farmhouse, or a cluster of cottages, until about noon we caught a glimpse of a stretch of grey water. On this lonely mere no boat was to be seen, nor any house on its banks, merely a bit of leaden-coloured water placed amid the soft and low-lying woods. Then we caught the glimmer of another sheet of cold grey, and by and by, driving under and through an avenue of trees, we came full in sight of Ellesmere.

The small lake looked rather dismal just then. There was a slight stirring of wind on its surface, which destroyed the reflection of the woods along its shores, so that the water was pretty much the counterpart of the gloomy sky above. At this moment, too, the moisture in the air began to touch our faces, and everything portended a shower. Bell drove us past the mere and on to the small village, where Castor and Pollux were safely lodged in the stables of the "Bridgewater Arms."

We had got into shelter just in time. Down came the rain with a will; but we were unconcernedly having luncheon in a long apartment which the landlord had

recently added on to his premises. Then we darted across the yard to the billiard-room, where Bell and my Lady having taken up lofty positions in order to overlook the tournament, we proceeded to knock the balls about until the shower should cease.

The rain, however, showed no symptoms of leaving off, so we resolved to remain at Ellesmere that night, and the rest of the afternoon was spent in getting up arrears of correspondence and similar work. It was not until after dinner that it was found the rain-clouds had finally gathered themselves together, and then, when we went out for a stroll, in obedience to Bell's earnest prayer, the evening had drawn on apace.

The darkening waters of the lake were now surrounded by low clouds of white mist, that hung about the still and wet woods. From the surface of the mere, too, a faint vapour seemed to rise, so that the shores on the other side had grown dim and vague. The trees were still dropping large drops into the plashing road; runnels of water showed how heavy the rain had been: and it seemed as if the grey and ghostly plain of the lake were still stirred by the commotion of the showers. The reflection of a small yacht out from the shore was blurred and indistinct; and underneath the wooded island beyond there only reigned a deeper gloom on the mere.

Of course, no reasonable person could have thought

of going out in a boat on this damp evening; but Bell having expressed some wish of the kind, the Lieutenant forthwith declared we should soon have a boat, however late the hour. He dragged us through a wet garden to a house set amid trees by the side of the lake. He summoned a worthy woman, and overcame her wonder and objections and remonstrances in about a couple of minutes. In a very short space of time we found ourselves in a massive and unwieldy punt, out in the middle of this grey sheet of water, with the chill darkness of night rapidly descending.

"We shall all have neuralgia, and rheumatism, and colds to-morrow," said my Lady, contentedly. "And all because of this mad girl, who thinks she can see ghosts wherever there is a little mist. Bell, do you remember——"

Tita stopped suddenly, and grasped my arm. A white something had suddenly borne down upon us, and not for a second or two did we recognize the fact that it was merely a swan, bent on a mission of curiosity. Far away beyond the solitary animal there now became visible a faint line of white, and we knew that there the members of his tribe were awaiting his report.

The two long oars plashed in the silence, we glided onwards through the cold mists, and the woods of the opposite shore were now coming near. How long we

floated thus, through the gloomy vapours of the lake, I cannot tell. We were bent on no particular mission; and somehow the extreme silence was grateful to us. But what was this new light that was seen to be stealing up behind the trees, a faint glow that began to tell upon the sky, and reveal to us the conformation of the clouds? The mists of the lake deepened, but the sky lightened, and we could see breaks in it, long stripes of a soft and pale yellow. The faint suffusion of yellow light seemed to lend a little warmth to the damp and chill atmosphere. Bell had not uttered a word. She had been watching this growing light with patient eyes, only turning at times to see how the island was becoming more distinct in the darkness. And then more and more rapidly the radiance spread up and over the south-east, the clouds got thinner and thinner, until all at once we saw the white glimmer of the disc of the moon leap into a long crevice in the dark sky. And lo! all the scene around us was changed; the mists were gradually dispersed and driven to the shores; the trees on the island became sharp, black bars against a flood of light; and on the dark bosom of the water lay a long lane of silver, intertwisting itself with millions of gleaming lines, and flashing on the ripples that went quivering back from the hull of our boat. We were floating on an enchanted lake, set far away amid these solitary woods.

"Every day, I think," said Bell, "we come to something more beautiful in this journey."

"Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant, suddenly, "your country it has been too much for me; I have resolved to come to live here always, and in five years, if I choose it, I shall be able to be naturalized, and consider England as my own country."

The moonlight was touching softly at this moment the outlines of Bell's face, but the rest of the face was in shadow, and we could not see what evidence of surprise was written there.

"You are not serious?" she said.

"I am."

"And you mean to give up your country because you like the scenery of another country?"

That, plainly put, was what the proposal of the Count amounted to, as he had expressed it; but even he seemed somewhat taken aback by its apparent absurdity.

"No," he said, "you must not put it all down to one reason; there are many reasons, some of them important; but at all events it is sure that if I come to live in England, I shall not be disappointed of having much pleasure in travelling."

"With you it may be different," said Bell, almost repeating what I had said the day before to the young man. "I wish we could always be travelling and meet-

ing with such pleasant scenes as this. But this holiday is a very exceptional thing."

"So much the worse," said the Lieutenant, with the air of a man who thinks he is being hardly used by destiny.

"But tell me," broke in my Lady, as the boat lay in the path of the moonlight, almost motionless, "have you calculated the consequences of your becoming an exile?"

"An exile! There are many thousands of my countrymen in England; they do not seem to suffer much of regret because they are exiles."

"Suppose we were to go to war with Germany?"

"Madame," observed the Lieutenant, seriously, "if you regard one possibility, why not another? Should I not hesitate of living in England for fear of a comet striking your country rather than Germany? No: I do not think there is any chance of either; but if there is a war, then I consider whether I am more bound to Germany or to England. And that is a question of the ties you may form, which may be more strong than merely that you chance to have been born in a particular place."

"These are not patriotic sentiments," remarks my Lady, in a voice which shows she is pleased as well as amused by the announcement of them.

"Patriotism!" he said, "that is very good—but you need not make it a fetish. Perhaps I have more right to be patriotic in a country that I choose for my own,

than in a country where I am born without any choice of my own. But I do not find my countrymen when they come to England much troubled by such things: and I do not think your countrymen, when they go to America, consult the philosophers, and say what they would do in a war. If you will allow me to differ from you, Madame, I do not think that is a great objection to my living in England."

An objection—coming from her! The honest Lieutenant meant no sarcasm; but if a blush remained in my Lady's system—which is pretty well trained, I admit, to repress such symptoms of consciousness—surely it ought to have been visible on this clear moonlight night.

At length we had to make for the shore. It seemed as though we were leaving out there on the water all the white wonder of the moon; but when we had run the boat into the boat-house and got up among the trees, there too was the strong white light, gleaming on black branches, and throwing bars of shadow across the pale brown road. We started on our way back to the village, by the margin of the mere. The mists seemed colder here than out on the water; and now we could see the moonlight struggling with a faint white haze that lay over all the surface of the lake. My Lady and Bell walked on in front; the Lieutenant was apparently desirous to linger a little behind.

"You know," he said, in a low voice, and with a little embarrassment, "why I have resolved to live in England."

"I can guess."

"I mean to ask Mademoiselle to-morrow—if I have the chance—if she will become my wife."

"You will be a fool for your pains."

"What is that phrase? I do not comprehend it," he said.

"You will make a mistake if you do. She will refuse you."

"And well?" he said. "Does not every man run the chance of that? I will not blame her—no; but it is better I should ask her, and be assured of this one way or the other."

"You do not understand. Apart from all other considerations, Bell would almost certainly object to entertaining such a proposal after a few days' acquaintanceship——"

"A few days!" he exclaimed. "*Du Himmel!* I have known her years and years ago—very well we were acquainted——"

"But the acquaintanceship of a boy is nothing. You are almost a stranger to her now."

"See here," he urged. "We do know more of each other in this week or two than if I had seen her for many seasons of your London society. We have seen

each other at all times—under all ways—not mere talking in a dance, or so forth."

"But you know she has not definitely broken off with Arthur yet."

"Then the sooner the better," said the Lieutenant, bluntly. "How is it you do all fear him, and the annoyance of his coming? Is a young lady likely to have much sympathy for him, when he is very disagreeable, and rude, and angry? Now, this is what I think about him. I am afraid Mademoiselle is very sorry to tell him to go away. They are old friends. But she would like him to go away, for he is very jealous, and angry, and rude; and so I go to her, and say—no, I will not tell you what my argument is, but I hope I will show Mademoiselle it will be better if she will promise to be my wife, and then this pitiful fellow he will be told not to distress her any more. If she says no—it is a misfortune for me, but none to her. If she says yes, then I will look out that she is not any more annoyed—that is quite certain."

"I hope you don't wish to marry merely to rescue a distressed damsel."

"Bah," he said, "you know it is not that. But you English people, you always make your jokes about these things—not very good jokes either—and do not talk frankly about it. When Madame comes to hear of this—and if Mademoiselle is good enough not to

cast me away—it will be a hard time for us, I know, from morning until night. But have I not told you what I have considered this young lady—so very generous in her nature, and not thinking of herself—so very frank and good-natured to all people around her—and of a good, light heart, that shows she can enjoy the world, and is of a happy disposition, and will be a very noble companion for the man who marries her? I would tell you much more, but I cannot in your language."

At all events, he had picked up a good many flattering adjectives. Mademoiselle's dowry in that respect was likely to be considerable.

Here we got back to the inn. Glasses were brought in, and we had a final game of bézique before retiring for the night; but the Lieutenant's manner towards Bell was singularly constrained and almost distant, and he regarded her occasionally in a somewhat timid and anxious way.

[*Note by Queen Titania.*—"It is perhaps unnecessary for me to explain that I am not responsible for the strange notions that may enter the heads of two light-hearted young people when they are away for a holiday. But I must protest against the insinuation—conveyed in a manner *which I will not describe* that I was throughout scheming against Arthur's suit with our Bell. That poor boy is the son of two of my oldest friends; and for himself we have always had the greatest esteem and liking. If he caused us a little annoyance at this time, he had perhaps a sort of excuse for it—which is more than *some people* can say, when they have long ago got over the jealousies of courtship, and yet do not cease to persecute their wives

with *far from good-natured* jests—and it is, I think, a little unfair to represent me as being blind to his peculiar situation, or unmerciful towards himself. On the contrary, I am sure I did everything I could to smooth over the unpleasant incidents of his visit; but I did not find it incumbent on me to become a *partisan*, and spend hours in getting up philosophical—*philosophical!*—excuses for a rudeness which was really unpardonable. What I chiefly wish for, I know, is to see all those young folks happy and enjoying themselves; but it would puzzle *wiser heads than mine* to find a means of reconciling them. As for Count von Rosen, if he made up his mind to ask Bell to be his wife, because Ellesmere looked pretty when the moon came out, I cannot help it. It is some years since I gave up the idea of attempting to account for the odd freaks and impulses that get into the heads of what I suppose we must call the *superior sex.*"]

END OF VOL. I.

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